Chapter -5

SHOBHAA DE - A NOVELIST WITH A DIFFERENCE
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Shobhaa De—a writer with a sharp edge

Shobhaa De is a writer who wields the pen with pungent ink within it sometimes loving sometimes hurting , at other times maligning and often exposing the painful sores of society

She has powerful eyes to see what we do not notice and has absorbent ears to hear voices that escape our ears. These uncanny qualities have been well linked together by a strong underlying thread of courage and conviction . She is a writer of substance though one may not agree to that entire she says in her novels or other writings. All her writings have not got the same seriousness and sometimes they are frivolous and at times she writes for the sake of writing. But these negative aspects do not make her writing less significant in the present Indian intellectual scenario. She is perhaps the first woman writer to write about man -woman relationship with our inhibitions, Of course there is Kamala Das who, through her poems and her MY STORY brought out the hypocrisy of that pervades all human relationships. De differs from Das in the sense that De is more familiar with the darker side of the so called sophisticated section of society which parades as a decent crowd when there is sunshine. The sunset brings about a great transformation in social actions and cosmetics take over in bright lights or in more fashionable candle lights. Morality (Does that word means anything in the modern world?) takes a backseat and people become shadows. De is familiar with this world and she watches everything and writes beautifully about the ugly world of hypocritical relationships...

In this fast world nobody has the time to stand and stare. Things are taking a worse turn with the globalization of our economy. Any change brings in both good and bad things but always, believe me, we have the power to choose what is good for us. Import technology, bring in new ideas and adapt them to our situation, and enjoy the benefit of globalization—but be sure that we are Indians with our own evolved culture which is a result of centuries. Accept whatever is good from the west as they accept whatever is good from the east. Let there be a harmonious blending of the two cultural entities
retaining the significant features of each to itself. This will be the beginning of a global cultural evolution with tolerance as its base.

I started with De and the very fact that I have wandered into some thoughts about the modern world itself. The writings of De have a peculiar quality that influences you to take her sides. Her prose is, powerful and the passion in her writing never sags. So be careful when you read De, for she will carry you along with her without your knowing about it. Read, meditate, digest and take what you feel good and with courage and conviction reject what you feel not very convincing. Have a date with De’s books and columns for they are thrilling, tempting and never boring.

**A List of Shobhaa De’s Novels:**

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Shobhaa De – A Novelist:

Shobhaa De, a controversial writer, has had diverse career roles ranging from model to columnist. All her published novels have been successful. Currently we have witnessed her make a literary transition from writing-projects based on a rather flashy, elite society with emphasis on its extra-marital affairs, to a more mature and rather philosophical work on life and the myriad of twists and turns in relationships. Her rapier sharp wits, her incisive writing, her penchant to call a spade a spade have all contributed to her signature style over the years. She spares none as a social commentator. Author, columnist, fashion designer, socialite and now publisher, Shobhaa De continues to reinvent herself as years roll on.

Shobhaa De as a writer is gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. The way she narrates each and every aspects of human relationship in general and man-woman relationship in particular is really wonderful. The orthodox people in India criticize her for her open discussion of sexual matters. But her fiction has got tremendous response not only from several European countries but people all over read and enjoy her fiction. It is no less an achievement. In fact, as a writer she differs considerably from other Indian women –novelists writing in English. She is a writer who believes in very frank narration of incidents and absolute open-heartedness. We don’t find anything reserved in her fiction from narrative point of view. She is the last person to care for what orthodox readers say about the subject-matter of her fiction. As a creative writer, she became immensely popular day by day. Most of the readers enjoy her extraordinary narrative technique as well as her subject matter. Shobhaa De burst upon the literary scene with her best-seller *Socialite Evenings* in 1988, which was followed by *Starry Nights* in 1990, *Sisters* and *Strange Obsession* in 1992, *Sultry Days* in 1994, *Snapshots* on 1995 and *Second Thoughts* in 1996. The popularity of Shobhaa De’s novels is due to their contents, her mastery over the art of storytelling and her use of language. These novels are set in the glittering backdrop of Mumbai’s social circle where men and women lead luxurious but reckless lives, throwing away all traditional and moral inhibitions of the conservative Indian society. Her women are obsessed with aspiration for wealth, power and fame. They acquire an image of the traditional Indian
women who devote their lifetime in the service of their husbands and family. These women are highly challenging, educated and assertive. They are out to tell men that whatever they do, they too are entitled to do the same. They go in for high flying careers like modeling, movies, high power business, journalism and advertising. They keep a string of men tied under their belts, so that when one fails to live up to their expectations, they can move on to the next one. In fact, her novels seem to be the modern version of picaresque novels of the eighteenth century.

In her work like *Socialite Evenings, Strange Obsession, Sisters, Sultry Days*, Shobhaa De attempts to portray the above discussed feminine characteristics. Her female protagonists are just remarkable when measured against men. Men women relationship is almost hollow, ineffectual and compromising. The men-women’s complementary image has been completely shattered. In her novels, the world is out of sexual orders; she has tried to highlight the discord in marital relationship. It is usually painful and destructive for them to be together. Karuna in *Socialite Evenings*, Mikki and Alisha in *Sisters* and Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights* appear to be rebellious modern Indian women who challenge the orthodoxy of sexual and social taboos. They are certainly different from the sexually ignorant Indian woman as described by Khushwant Singh and other Indian writers. Khushwant Singh represents an age old view about Indian women. *This is all most Indian women know of sex- an unpleasant subjection to men’s desire necessary in order to have sons, bearable because of its brevity.* But Shobhaa De presents them forcefully in her works. Her female protagonists challenge the traditional set up of the society.

She is isolated from the traditional Indian heritage and its social implications. Shobhaa De has fully exposed the feminine world of the characters, for her humanness should be identified with "femininity." With dissident women like Karuna and Anjali oppressive gender roles will be deconstructed and women will take up a revolutionary role. Shobhaa De's women suffer because they do not cherish genuine passions but plastic passions. They give up the conventional sense of morality and reveal the erotic celebration of body. It seems that Shobhaa De views women as nothing but a sex, a means to satisfy masculine lust. Towards the end Karuna comes out as a person, with a confident statement that single is good for her. She is so sure of her decision though she knows it is
an unusual feeling about Indian woman. Karuna's quest ends here or not remains a question answered. Towards the end we can see Karuna looking blankly into space, all-alone in her room. Man is a social animal. He is an emotional and intellectual being. It is in the nature of man or woman to share their feelings. This quality in man always searches for a companion. Karuna is no exception, she too needs a company but she is a burnt child. She cannot gamble again. Economically, mentally and physically she is a liberated woman, yet as a human being she might be craving for that sort of companion who won't rob her off her freedom, which she has gained. In this respect they represent the woman of twenty first century, who is torn between freedom and instinct-the proper decision is yet to be taken - the quest may not end here-it might continue to take new decisions.

**Novelty in Shobhaa De’s Novels:**

As is known about her personality, Shobhaa De depicts similar traits in her characters as well. As multi talented she is so are her characters depicted in different novels. Every novel is woven around characters that are very different from each other. This multifarious nature of her characters shows that Shobhaa De is very adaptive to different role models and identifies with the characters perfectly. Nowhere in her novels do we see the characters lacking the traits of the roles allotted to them. She blends the characters so well in their role models that in spite of their varied characteristics they seem to be perfect depiction of their characters. We will take a peep into some of her books to understand how her novels are an assorted collection of her style, theme, characterization, presentation, etc.

A Novelist is first and foremost an individual with a personal vision. At the same time he/she is a personality living in a particular period of time, in a particular place, in a particular social environment. He/ she is an individual and a member of the society, and, therefore, society inevitably plays its part in his/her novel. The writer may be in sympathy with his/her social environment or in rebellion against it, he/she may try to reject it, but its influence will be there. The novel may not be an event in social history, but it is an assertion of the novelist's singular identity. Things and events depicted in the
novel might not have happened to him/her, but he/she invents them camouflaging them as real to elicit reader's total participation. Shobhaa De precisely does that in her novels. Social concern is the main thrust of all her novels.

**Shobhaa De’s novels indicating the arrival of a new Indian woman eager to defy the well-entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system:**

**Socialite Evenings (1988):**

The lives of the "page 3" class, the agony and frustration, the tears and cattiness are ideally depicted in this marvelous novel, *Socialite evenings*. The hollowness and emptiness of the life of the upper middleclass are ideally illustrated. It is a novel about Mumbai's elite, as seen through the wide eyes of a young woman. *Socialite Evenings* is Shobhaa De’s first novel. It describes a backdrop of Bombay high society and the lives of bored, rich housewives trapped in loveless marriages and engaged in ill-fated extramarital affairs, smug selfish husbands who use their wives more for social respectability than for love, fashionable parties, false spiritual leaders, and a portrait of the general moral, spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy and decadence of the Mumbai elite who have traded in their traditional culture for near total Westernization and the discarding of any discernible values other than materialism. Karuna, the main protagonist and narrator is caught up in a drab, boring life and she seeks to escape by writing her memoirs. Her memoirs are successful and she achieves a measure of fame and pride in herself as she becomes an active socialite and eventually uses her newfound prominence as a celebrity to get herself a position as an advertising copywriter and creator of a television series. *Socialite Evenings* gives us the picture of the marginalization of Indian women at the hands of their husbands. Shobhaa De’s is the picture of women not only as protagonists but also as motivating factors in society, initiating and regulating their own lives as well as the lives of others in the voluptuously, fascinating world of Bombayites, its enticing glitter and glamour. Karuna in this novel never treats her husband as her partner deserving due attention and care. His presence is minimized as much as possible. The name of the husband is not revealed throughout the novel; only the word 'He' is used to
refer to him. After divorcing her husband, her mother insists her to remarry, but she refuses by saying – *But mother, why does security rest with a man? I feel confident now that I look after myself. I am earning as much as any man. I have a roof over my head. I don’t really have any responsibilities. I am at peace with myself. I’m not answerable to anyone; I don’t feel like complicating my life, by getting into a second marriage.*

In conclusion it can be said that Shobhaa De in *Socialite Evenings* has presented her protagonist, Karuna as self confident and potential woman who strives to get total freedom from man and to change the social concept of women. She shows her faith in the power of women. Karuna represents her new women who are full of confidence and look forward hopefully for a satisfied free life. She represents the middle class urban married women who are conscious of their legal, social and conjugal rights. She is possessive and committed to realize her dreams anyhow. Like traditional wife, she doesn’t think of morality. She manipulates man and marriage as an opportunity to actualize her goals. Whenever this commitment is not fulfilled she rebels and comes out as a non conformist. As a modern Indian educated married woman she emerges with her new identity and changing image. De condemns in her writing the brutal approach of man to married woman. She believes that women have to be aware of their identity as human beings and think for themselves. This is what she does in her novels particularly *Socialite Evenings* in which she offers her discontent towards this patriarchal Indian society through her unique character portrayal. In *Socialite Evenings* she has depicted her woman, Karuna, not as traditional housewife but as challenging character not to be yield to male egoistic behavior. She is no more feeble “second sex”. The strong and challenging nature of her women bring them new image, they can disobey her authoritative husband. These new women are not only ‘powerful’ but also “calculative and use men as means to an end”. They don’t hesitate to protest against male injustice. Even they don’t care for moral values, if necessary. In fact De reshapes her women characters as aggressive blasters of the male ego and male hierarchy. She represents her new women with possessive spirit and self- confidence. They are not puppet in the Phallus centric Indian hierarchy. De observes: *The women in my books are not definitely door mats. They are not willing to be kicked around.*
The most noticeable aspect of her writing is her vehement approach towards woman’s problems. Her entire focus is to present her work more realistic which is considered as an excellent complement in the realm of popular fiction writing. Her work is a revolt against society and social norms laid down to under-estimate woman. Her woman is trying to seek self fulfillment through self-actualization. The new woman is out to carve out an identity of her own. She is little willing to live within the four walls of the house. She wants to move out of it and explore new horizons. She ventures to take up high-flying, well-paid jobs. Until recently, a woman however well-educated she might have been, had to be content with socially acceptable jobs like teaching, medicine, law, etc. But now her job preferences have changed. De's women are in modeling, films, advertising, journalism, business, etc. De's intention is to reconstruct this established social theory about woman. She wishes that man has to come to know woman’s power as a destructive one. She has designed an atmosphere where woman is not living as a victim but a victor. In her works, she has advocated rebellious sort of woman ready to revolt against established social taboos which tie her to behave as passive one and always be subjugated by man’s authority. A well known critic Janaki Ramchandra, rightly comments about Shobhaa saying – You may love or hate her, but it is difficult to ignore her.

In Socialite Evenings, she explored the lives of the bored housewives and their loveless life of rich industrialist families. This book was critically acclaimed and it is still considered as a masterpiece. (2)

Snapshots- Another Jewel in Shobhaa Crown:

Though it is considered cliché for women to write about domestic and married life, to paint it with the colors of brutal honesty is how Shobhaa De stands out. A leading novelist of contemporary India and an enterprising journalist, Shobhaa De is one of the few bold women who do not look back once they step their foot down for something. The Indian high societies or the so-called high-class people are, to put it in raw terms,
“conveniently hypocritical.” Shobhaa De bravely exposes this clandestine Hi-Fi life of the Bombay elite.

The book can be interpreted in different manners, but what fits it best is a reality novel wherein through fictitious characters upon a platform, reality is depicted. Clearly the writer had the urban and the high-class reader in mind as it is they she represents through her characters. The book introduces characters one-by-one in each chapter at the start of the novel. Her characters are a mix of actors, socialites, aristocrats and high-class housewives.

The book jacket reveals to us that six old friends meet over lunch and it is here that a lot of dark secrets are discovered and confessions made. What catches a reader’s interest is the part which talks about the evil running behind the “smooth” lives of all these friends. Anyone aware of the truth of the so-called elites of our society will not leave the opportunity to read more.

What is catching about the novel is how brilliantly Shobhaa De entwines together all the faulty aspects of today’s so-called high-class Indian society, which likes to maintain a clean, well mannered and trimmed cover for all the accepted insecurities and dissatisfactions leading to disloyalties and broken lives. Surprised as we may act, it’s a well-known and well-ignored fact that if we Indians have copied anything from the West in terms of being modern, then it is infidelity, no-strings-attached relations, sex friends etc. And along with this came incest, rape, lies and evil that lurk in the shadow of the imagined reality.

Shobhaa De strips off the covers of the high-class in our society. She portrays women in terms which may be seen as derogatory by some. However, the idea is to show, that for today’s unfortunate so-called “cool and broad minded” youth, the idea of a successful or an independent or a free woman is a woman who lives her individuality by throwing away her modesty, giving herself up to any man she finds attractive for fifteen minutes. It’s fashion to have a zillion boyfriends or to have extra marital affairs or to sleep with relatives. Marriages are based on looks, social stature, bank balance, car, house, and of
course sex. Also, “sex is easy money and shortcut to all dreams.” That’s almost an anthem.

As bold and substantial the book is, it has major faults. The most prominent of all is the title. Snapshots does not relate much to the story. The most valid justification for this title is only that when all the six friends in the story are planning to meet up, one of them comes up with the idea of bringing old snapshots.

The Snapshots did turn up but were hardly relevant to the theme of the story though they do add a little masala to the story in one particular case. Surely the writer could have done more justice to the story.

Second and the most profound flaw is too much of sex in the book. There is so much of unnecessary discussion and description of sex in the story that at some places one loses track of the story. Due to all the unnecessary focus on sex, a common reader may disregard the novel as “dirty” or simply read it for being dirty, and not reach beyond it to the exposure which the writer intends.

Instead of giving so much space to talking about sex, that space could have been used better to develop a louder and stronger story, which brings me to the next obvious flaw.

The fictitious aspect of the novel or the story is not well formed. Shobhaa uses a technique called “stream of consciousness” wherein she uses the subconscious memory of the characters and time to explore and bring out the insight of the characters to the reader. However she builds a ground for a story, and then leaves it hanging. The end is abrupt and the reader is too shocked to realize it. (3)

Love-Hate Relationship in Shobhaa De's Sisters:

Sisters is considered as an explosive novel of Shobhaa De. It is known for its Racy narrative Quality” and for its “ostensibly intimate view of glitzy side of Bombay life. (4)
The novel deals with the psychic conflict in its liberated woman protagonist who is caught between a personal self and a societal self. The novel deals with the theme of women’s struggle for identity in the male-dominated society. Apart from this, the novel records the suffering of a woman in the patriarchal set up. In this set up, she is treated as an object.

In the novels of Shobhaa De, men are depicted as hesitant, coward and fearful. Her women are not going to be emotional, subdued and weak ladies of manners. On the contrary, they are to be assertive, pragmatic and strong. Shobhaa De’s women, symbolize the overpowering materialism and the lack of spirituality that characterized modern age.\(^{(5)}\) In the novel *Sisters*, we encounter a woman who struggles against constraints of being woman. Finally she succeeds in asserting her identity. In this novel Shobhaa De has been successful in depicting the story of two upper class young business women in modern India within the ambit of the art of fiction. The theme of the novel makes an interesting reading. Mikki (Mallika), the protagonist returned home, following the deaths of parents in an air-crash. Seth Hiralal and his wife (Mikki’s parents) were survived by their only daughter and heir to their vast property. Mikki returned home and oversaw their funeral and took charge of Hiralal Industries. Seth Hiralal had fathered another daughter, named Alisha by his concubine, Leelaben. This secret was known to Ramanbhai, a trusted employee of the Seth. Alisha was spitting venom on Mikki for not being able to get the social sanction as Seth’s daughter. She was outraged by the obituary column that the Seth was *Survived by his only child, a daughter, Mallika studying in the US and decided to take on her step-sister one day.*\(^{(6)}\)

Behind this interesting and apparently simple story lies the ground swell of frustration in the lives of two women between whose desire and fulfillment falls the shadow. Their characters could be profitably analyzed, if read in the light of Reader-Response criticism. The most important thing in Reader-Response criticism is that the reader must be made to feel for himself the new meaning of the novel. To do this he must actively participate in bringing out the meaning and this participation is an essential precondition for communication between the reader and the writer. The reader should have the knowledge of the tradition and cultural background against
which the novel has been set. Otherwise he would not be able to decipher the images and symbols through which the novelist seeks to convey his meaning. Wayne C Booth has described the art of reading fiction in the following words:

*The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader, he makes his reader as he makes his second self and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement.*

Women in the upper class society in India in recent years have outgrown Victorian taboos. They are no more prudent in public. The concept of morality arising out of love for one and the same person is out dated. They behave more or less like Restoration Comedy women who were given to the enjoyment of life through physical consummation of love before and after marriage and even outside marriage. The idea of marriage and constancy in love has undergone a sea change. Indian readers must not seek the prototypes of *Sita* and *Draupadi* in contemporary Society. The reader should do well to keep in mind this fact before trying to analyze the characters in Shobhaa De’s novels. Shobhaa De dives deep into the hearts of liberated upper class women of the contemporary society and depicts the characters as they are, not as they should have been. She is not concerned with the traditional concept of morality and purity in love. She depicts the lives of young men and women, particularly rich upper class (business community) people who no longer consider faithfulness and constancy in love a virtue. That is why she depicts the people in their true colours as what they are rather than what they should have been.

**Shobhaa De: A Novelist of Romance and Realism:**

We know that our mind has got three layers-conscious, unconscious and subconscious. Our mind according to Freud is just like an ice-berg of which the major part always lies hidden beneath the surface. So, if we want to study a man in its true perspective, we should try to study his interior more than his exterior. In psychology, it is, termed as
'voyage within' or 'vertical movement' and if a reader dives deep into the recess of De's novels, he finds that she being a student of psychology, has tried to study the interior workings of a character rather than his exterior behaviour. Moreover, sex, the root of all our energy, plays a very vital role in a man's life. And a number of novels by Shobhaa De analyze the various aspect of sex, a great urge of human being. Perhaps this is why her novels directly appeal to most of the readers of modern scientific and commercial world where a large number of people are wildly hungry for power, wealth and sex.

The central theme of Shobhaa De's novels is woman, her relation with family and society, and her famous book, *Small Betrayals*, which is a collection of some short and beautiful stories; she very well tries to examine the structure of despair that emerges out of a feminine discourse on the sad tale of hapless women and men. We may recall in this regard the remarks of Luce Irizarry, an eminent exponent of French feminism,

*The relationship of women to their mothers and to other woman thus toward themselves are rare subject to total narcissistic "black out," these relationships are completely devalued. Indeed I have never come across a woman who doesn't suffer from the problem of not been able to resolve in harmony in the present system, her relationship with her mother and with other women. Psychoanalysis has totally mythologized and "censored" the positive value of these relationships.*

*The Motorcycle* a famous story in *Small Betrayal* very well deals with man-woman relationship in a patriarchal family that presents an obstacle in the path of love between Pesi, the Parsee bachelor of 51 years old and Mohini, a Hindu teenage girl. Pesi managed to meet Mohini daily at a motorcycle garage from where their love begins. But the patriarchal domination in a traditional family becomes dead against them. The mother of Pesi, who resembled one of *Macbeth’s witches*, prevents his son from taking the step of love that goes against the age old norms of a traditional Parsee family. She objects:

*It is not possible. That Hindu girl has done black magic on you. Khodai! Marriage — and that too to a non-Parsee! Have you gone completely mad? Or are you so desperate for sex. Go to a prostitute, dikra, if you have to satisfy your urges. But mark Mama's*
words — these sort of ridiculous affairs don't work. I won't call it a marriage since nobody in our community will recognize it as one. And mind you won't be able to show your face at a Parsee wedding or funeral if you do it.\(^{(8)}\)

It is to be noted that such patriarchal domination and such utterance can also be seen in Arundhati Roy's famous debut novel *The God of Small Things* in which Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and Pappachi fling the same treatment to Ammu, the forsaken and divorced lady.

Well, in this story, Shobhaa De also presents a modern woman's attitude towards her right. Now women are not the flowers in the hands of men. So, Mohini is also not going to be meek and polite. She asserts her claim like Candida in the play of G.B.Shaw. She puts her arm around Pesi and says:

*Why should I be mean to her? Unless she is mean to me. ....I'm not Mother Teresa but I am nice to people who are nice to me. If she's horrid, I'll be horrid. Don't worry, we women know about such things. We can handle it.*

Thus, here the author wants to present a tale of confrontation between religion and love. Love is more powerful than religion. So religion should learn from love, a sense of reciprocal attitude, so that the plant of love blooms and blossoms and yields the fruits of mutual satisfaction and cooperation.

It is to be noted that Shobhaa De, like D.H. Lawrence, has openly portrayed the picture of sex in most of her novels. But they are not easily termed as pornography. It has some fine images and symbols, words and phrases which makes it attractive to the connoisseur of art. In art, it is not the matter that matters but manner that matters. Arundhali Roy has also portrayed a naked picture of sex between Ammu and Velutha in her novel *The God of small Things*. But if we judge it minutely, we find that she has lived up to the poetic ideals. Moreover Freud has, expounded a highly revolutionary theory about sex. So, now sex is not a taboo but a part and parcel of life. D.H. Lawrence even went to the extent of making sex a religion.\(^{(9)}\)
Thus, this brief survey shows De's perceptive portrayal of the secret depths of the human psyche; her accurate characterization, her saucy, racy and captivating style which invokes vivid images and compels the reader to identify himself or herself with the characters and situations. She has tried her best to expose the moral and spiritual breakdown of modern society in which a hapless and forsaken woman longs for pleasure and wants to fly freely in the sky of freedom. Though she has been severely criticized, we should always bear in our mind that whatever she has written they are all fine pieces of poetic and metaphoric exactitude which will haunt our mind long after reading her works. What matters most in her novel is her simplicity of language which encompasses its own exquisite world of passion, romance, fantasy and inevitable hard reality.

**Women, Love and Marriage in Shobhaa De's Fiction:**

Love desire and romance as experienced by the women in the socialite society is a recurring theme in Shobhaa De's novels. *Socialite Evening*, explores the relationship of man and woman in modern society. Desire, both for material advancement and for sexual fulfillment, becomes the central motif in the materialistic modern society influenced by the West- A woman self-fashions in the materialistic world. Such self-fashioning is necessarily self-dividing. Shobhaa De's art of characterization depends heavily upon contrasting the public and private selves of her women character in a male dominated world. Shobhaa De's women fashion and seek new selves and a fresh "truth" as their traditional paradigm of love, desire and romance are deconstructed by their experience of exploitative male chauvinist society. Images of romance and sexuality create a conflict in the social and cultural code of the old and the new society. This conflict brings forth the binary nature of all human desire, the necessity of moral definition and the difficulty in moral definition. For a woman in new society 'Love' symbolizes the anarchy of self. The women that seeks to refashion themselves are predominantly materialistic, liberated and are usually public figures. Karuna is a prominent Mumbai socialite (*Socialite Evening*) and Asha Rani is the unrivalled number one star of Hollywood (*Starry Nights*). In her novel *Starry Nights*, this prominent novelist portrays the love story of two popular celluloid stars. It is the story of high class people and it wonderfully depicts the dark side of the Hindi film industry. Maya (*Second Thoughts*) is an exception. She is a pretty-
young woman who escapes her dull-middle class background in Calcutta, by marrying Ranjan a handsome, hard-driving and ambitious man with American degree and wealthy background. The men with all the wealth, affluence and prosperity of their public lives contrast sharply with the self-division, deprivation and turmoil of their sexual and emotional lives. (10)

**Woman’s crusade for self liberation and then final submission in Shobhaa De’s novel ‘Second Thoughts’**

In her novel Shobhaa De has portrayed an aspect of a woman who is educated, intelligent, talented and yet bounded by the chains of societal system and her duties towards her family. *Second Thought* is a novel which is a lament on the disharmony of domestic life and Maya is the sufferer of this disharmony. The theme of disharmony brings into sharp contrast the strongly individualized character of Maya. Maya is both an individual and a convention bound loyal Hindu wife in spite of the neglect and humiliation heaped upon by her husband taking it to be her inevitable destiny. Maya’s tragedy is that she is not treated as an individual but as a liability by her mother before marriage and as a commodity by her husband after marriage. Maya is a girl from Kolkata who gets married to Ranjan and shifts to Mumbai with dreams of exploring this wild city which has so much to offer. But her husband, Ranjan, is a conservative chap and a typical mama’s boy who believes that women are best when they are homemakers. The marriage soon becomes a formality and she feels trapped in her house and her marriage with almost no contact from outside. She yearns and longs to be on her own and independent. Shobhaa De has portrayed in very simple and lucid words, the conjugal disharmony that exists between the couple. This conjugal disharmony leads to an attraction with her neighbouring boy Nikhil which ends up in an illicit love. In the character of Nikhil, Shobhaa De has given a vivid description of the artful and cunning flirts whose only vocation is to satisfy their own caprices and wreck the domestic life of many an indiscreet women. Nikhil does the same to Maya and walks out of her life in search of his new prey or to get back to the normal schedule of life, looking out for his new bride to be. Thus once again Shobhaa De's protagonist is compelled to accept life as it is, since there seems to be no way out of one’s fated condition. Her story is the story of an Indian
womanhood. ‘Sufferance is the norm for an Indian housewife’ and the norm is restored once again, after the momentary disturbance by Maya’s abnormal revolt. Freedom is a fine concept but creatures like Maya can do only one thing – accept the fate uncomplainingly. Maya’s failure thus makes one see the depth of an Indian women’s despair as a daughter and then as a wife. 

Selective Memory: Stories From My Life: An Autobiography or a Memoir:

“God must be a mother”

Above sentence inscribed by Shobhaa De in her book Speed Post is a keynote to her personality. Here’s a writer who talks about woman without waving a feminist flag. Her life story is a document of a woman writer for whom mother-hood and family-life is a celebration. She enjoys being a mother of six and her family is her greatest possession. She is the first modern mother who has a great faith in the new and candid generation. She frankly confesses that she has learnt a lot from this new generation to which her kids belong to. Surely, she is not a person whose chief interest is personal advancement in her profession. At the age of 50 she published her life-story entitled Stories from My Life. Written in a confident and candid voice, Selective Memory: Stories From my life, is remarkable for the honesty with which it captures life story of a woman who has been a legend in her own time. Selective Memory is preoccupied less with the myth as projected by the media and more with the reality that Shobhaa De embodies. Here she has been projected as a daring daughter, a homemaker wife and a worried mother. Generally, Shobhaa De has been considered a glamorous person lacking in the commitment to social cause. Selective Memory has worked wonders in favour of De. Leafing through the book, De emerges as a new woman possessing a mischievous charm and immense capacity to judge and understand other people. She is at her best in depicting the ties of human – relationships.

The first half of Selective Memory deals with her upbringing as the youngest child in a no-nonsense middle-class family. De was talented at both sports and getting caught
wearing forbidden lipstick and shorts. Behind her parents' backs she started modeling. Out of the blue came an offer to edit a new gossip magazine, and De's 10 years at *Stardust* provide tales of the rich and famous that will propel this book off retail shelves. The second half of the book, her own tale, is more compelling. She abandoned a first marriage and left behind two children--the details are scanty, except for her guilt--and then picked up again with a new husband and his children. There is reconciliation with her eldest two and two more babies. With a new surname, Shobhaa De the literary queen was born, as were some truly hilarious encounters. She recounts having her hair pressure-cooked and ironed for a shampoo ad; the boor in the restaurant who calls across the room, “Exactly how old are you?” My daughter and I have taken a bet on it. And there is rich material in her family's reactions to her image and steamy books. Her father, the stern patriarch of the book's beginning, turns confidante by its end, telephoning her one night to observe, I've noticed that in surveys about sexual attitudes, it's always the men who are asked questions on frequency... Women are rarely asked this. Meanwhile, son Aditya, after one of her early talk-show appearances, asks why his mother can't just sing and dance, like other TV artistes. The passage in *Selective Memory* worth the book's price is De's description of the death of her mother: a painful chapter filled with the guilt of a daughter, the dignity of her newly widowed father and the kind of poignant details found in the very best fiction. (12) We were taught early in life, De summarizes, that nothing comes easy; nothing is delivered on a platter. That saved me. And *Selective Memory* might get her reputation off the tiger skin for good.

Shobhaa De's *Selective Memories* seems selected from the columns she has written over the years. But the resemblance goes only as far as the easy conversational style of writing, for the book is the story of how Mumbai created this celebrity writer. *We feasted on each other, Bombay and I. I am a by-product of this city*, says De. But while she compares the fame this city gave her to an allergy, "not a hot and an angry on but just there under the skin," she admits that life would have been very different if she'd lived elsewhere. And in her many *avataars* -- a famous model, a copywriter and founding editor of *Stardust* and *Society* and a chronicler of Indian society through her columns -- Shobhaa De has seen Mumbai and its people up, close and personal. And she tells it just like that.
While *Selective Memories* is not a complete tell-all like Julia Phillip's account of Hollywood *You will Never Eat Lunch in this Town Again*, the book includes a 30-year culling together of society, soirees and selected (there's the word again) scandals. Like always, De hasn't been polite in print about what she thought was unacceptable. An alternate title for her book was Tell It As It Is, which is quite apt. If she thought Sir V S Naipaul could take a lesson or two in etiquette -- you have it right there on paper.

Shobhaa De, whose entire career is one of rebellion against patriarchy might accept the authority of authorship in her belief that she is in control of her matter and medium but in selective memory her construction of selfhood is subverted by the way she has Chosen to Carve up her life into those segments she has no reservations about revealing and serving up to readers. Thus, the self of the writer is de centered here. Shobhaa De has deliberately omitted some sensitive topic and in this process she has left out herself. *Selective Memory* is a record of her achievements, her views on life, society and human relationships but it is not a full circle to her life.

Shobhaa De’s *Selective Memory* has been written at a time in her life that is appropriate to take stock of things. In this epic first person narrative, Shobhaa De talks about the art of autobiography like a self conscious narrator. Suddenly she feels that five decades of her life has been already passed. In the ‘Prologue’ to *Selective Memory* she describes how she was persuaded to write her life-story by David Davidar of Penguin India now that she was nearing the mid-point age of fifty, the time for ‘Stock- taking’ and ‘Flashback’. As she began the task of “putting her life on line” the “exhilaration of forced remembering” empowered her to rediscover her past, which she had “lost touch with”“in her preoccupation with the present” De begins her life-story in the mood of ‘Sweet acceptance’. She doesn’t like to interpret this change as a sign of mellow. With a great zeal she welcomes her fiftieth year. She is not nostalgic to hanker after her earlier years, but ready to accept her new identity as a more experienced and elderly woman.

Generally, in an autobiography ‘self’ is placed at the center. Nevertheless man cannot live in isolation. An artist is a sum-total of his race, milieu and moment. De’s autobiography also is a sum-total of the experiences that she had in urban Bombay. Her
life-story marvelously portrays the impact of other individuals on herself. Maintaining the centrality of herself Shobhaa De has successfully created a galaxy of brilliant portraits in selective memory. Shobhaa De seems to be highly influenced by two great persons in her life and they are: Her father and Nari Hira – the owner of *Stardust* who inspired her to become a writer.

Obviously, De’s life-story does not depict her as a feminist. She neither sounds a feminist in her novels. Through her novels also she seems to be fighting for human rights. She firmly believes that a woman should be treated as a human-being. Nevertheless she is not a rebel. She has a great faith in the woman of her times and knows that they are ready to surpass all obstacles. She does not long for anything grand. The concept of a rebel is very negative to her. She says: *The image I harbor of a rebel is a negative one of a person who determinedly shatters known rules of conduct and upset everybody. I did swim against the tide but while I was doing so, my own sights were on getting to the other shore, not on the turbulence I may have been leaving in my wake.*\(^{(13)}\) On the other hand, De has scaled heights of success as an Indian woman “breaking through rigid barriers”. In her novels she has epitomized the face of the new woman- an all powerful and not at all ‘abala (the weaker one). Shobhaa De considers selective memory as a ‘writerly text’. One very striking aspect of her autobiography is the handling of language which signifies her gender-consciousness. There is an attempt at demolishing the male Ego while writing about males. For instance, she observes: male as insecure who “Feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient woman”.

The explosive autobiography of India's most controversial writer Shobhaa De has been many things to many people: supermodel, celebrity journalist and best-selling author; friend, rival, colleague and confidante. In this engagingly candid memoir, a woman who has been a familiar face and name to millions (although few know her) finally reveals the true self behind the public persona. Insiders know that besides her commitment to work and the frantic pace of her life, Shobhaa De's first priority in life has always been her family. Here she writes poignantly of her early years and of her relationship with her parents and siblings, her husband and her children. Shobhaa De's high voltage career 'happened' in unexpected ways, starting with her unplanned entry as a teenager into the
glamorous world of modeling, and moving on to her high-profile years as a magazine editor. In these avatars she keenly observed and astutely chronicled the new India—brash, affluent and ambitious. High-society hi-jinks, movie star follies, celebrity neurosis—none of these escaped her unsparing eye. And now she tells it all, just as it was, just as she saw it. In her inimitably forthright fashion, she writes of the choices she made, the decisions she took and the influences that shaped her. Written in a voice that is consistently confident and candid, Selective Memory: Stories from My Life, is remarkable for the honesty with which it captures the essence of a fascinating woman who has become a legend in her own time.

Thus, De advises to utilize our resources in the best manner and not to follow anything blindly. One should be proud of oneself. She solicits us to know our own selves and work efficiently. It is in the hands of would-be mothers to create a sharper, stronger and brighter India. We are proud to be Indian women. We have not only surpassed our male counterparts but also our western counterparts. De’s life-story is a sparkling record of what an ordinary but determined Indian woman can do.

**Shobhaa De’s Take on Marriage Vows in Her Novel**

**Spouse: The Truth about Marriage:**

*Spouse* is De’s anecdote on marriage. Spiced up with various incidents from De’s conjugal life, this book gives us the author’s point of view on the institution of marriage, on the ideal code of conduct for both spouses in their day-to-day dealings, on a couple’s moral obligations to each other, and much more. The book defines a set of conventions that a couple could follow in their dealings with their partner, children, in-laws and friends.

‘Spouse – the truth about marriage’ is a 286 page treatise about the Indian marriage. It is Shobhaa De’s anecdote on marriage spiced up with various incidents from De’s conjugal
life, the book gives us the author’s point of view on the institution of marriage, on the ideal code of conduct for both spouses in their day to day dealings on a couple’s moral obligations to each other and much more. To quote Shobhaa De, *Marriage is an adventure. It is about trust, companionship, affection and sharing. It’s about learning to cope with your partner’s moods and eccentricities.* The book defines a set of conventions that a couple could follow in their dealings with their partner, children, in-laws and friends. The book is De’s personal take on how they fail, the pressure that any Indian marriage undergoes with its share of tumults and pressures. De describes and gives her thoughts on marital conventions followed in De’s generations. The book gives a realistic portrayal of the innumerable facets of marriage and of society in the context of marriage. In the introduction, the author clarifies, *While this book isn’t exactly a marriage manual in the usual sense of the word, what it definitely discusses is, is a strong endorsement for being married and staying married.* The book definitely discusses various topics relating marriage and the author gives her opinion from her heart, whether it is in our liking or not, whether we accept it or not. *Spouse- the truth about marriage* is a book that deals with the success, failures, setbacks and joys of married life enlisting instances of her experiences. (14) The book talks about trust, companionship, affection, sharing and claims to enlist how marriages work and why they fail. This book speaks about the truth about marriage nowadays. Shobhaa De has been successful in penning down the truth in today’s relationship about husbands and wives. The book is open enough to admit marriage as an important institution, but has a powerful message that marriage caters to a basic human emotion of loving and being loved. This institution is being challenged like never before, but the greatness is evident from the fact that humanity is yet to come up with an alternate practice to cater to the basic needs of companionship, commitment and communication. There is a whole gamut of things that can go wrong in a marriage - starting from skirmishes over finances, interpersonal relationships, extended family relationships, too much sex or lack of sex, kids, lack of kids, affairs, jealousy, invasion of personal space, globalization. You name it and Shobhaa De has discussed it in *Spouse.* The book is, as she states in the foreword, more anecdotal, and far more entertaining than the drone of a psychiatrist merely churning out cases of marriages brought back from the
brink of disaster. *Spouse* is a rich repository, a memoir of Shobhaa De's life with her husband De, her children, her friends and those that touch her life via work. (15)

Unlike the image that most Indians have of Shobhaa as being a man-hating feminist, her self-deprecating and brutal self-reflection on her own weaknesses that have been the cause of a few minor skirmishes at home show her to be a sensible, mature woman. While reading the memoir of her life together with her second husband one gets to understand what makes an enigmatic vivacious personality like Shobhaa tick. She even discusses her first marriage in a frank manner:

*Marriages disintegrate for various reasons. Sometimes they fall apart by default. As my first one did. Maybe we both entered it at a wrong time in our respective lives. Maybe we had not thought of the decision through. Maybe our expectations didn't match. Maybe we grew in entirely different ways. Maybe I was a bit too headstrong, a bit too impatient. So many years later, there is much regret about the sadness caused. She believes in open communication, recognition of one’s own flaws while compromising on those of one’s partner (i.e. if they are minor quirks and not vile habits like alcoholism, drugs, womanizing etc,) and most importantly, she stresses the 3T's Theory that has been the foundation of her marriage - Time, Tenderness and Togetherness. Through the book she has pointed out that her husband (the romantic one in the relationship) has always ensured that they have time away from the family and the cares of the world, be it the evening tea with cheese and crackers or the Sunday getaways where they spend quiet relaxing weekends together so as to make up for the time lost during weekdays due to their individual heavy schedules. His need to enjoy all the special days like birthdays, anniversaries etc., are at best lovingly tolerated by Shobhaa and the kids, as are her quirky habits of being messy and unpunctual are exasperatingly tolerated by De. They have learned to live with the other's weaknesses and try to remain in tune with each other's wants, desires, hopes and aspirations despite the accepted once in a while bickering, sulking and then the make-up sex. Though I just added the last part (thankfully she doesn't give us the gory details of her sex life), Shobhaa has been frank in her discussion of sex. Creativity, communication and being considerate to one's spouse are the hallmarks of a healthy sex life. There is a great deal of ignorance about sex, even in
this day and age. Even in urban India. Even with all the sex talk on TV and in our movies. Even with the new 'openness', it's amazing how little people actually know about their own bodies and the potential inherent in exploring physical avenues as a couple. Misrepresentation of modern sexual 'trends' can lead to confusion. Couples who feel they aren't hip enough because they don't experiment enough get bogged down and discouraged.... Sex in a good marriage is not about taking, but about giving. It isn't about performance, it's about mutual pleasure. Sexual compatibility is achieved over a period of time, and through trust and caring. Further on, she discusses the need to shed one's inhibitions, to remove the word 'dirty' from sex and to relax when one is with the spouse especially when it's quality time without young children scampering around. Shobhaa De has been candid in her discussion about concepts like lack of chemistry between couples, the need to try and salvage a marriage if the differences are not too sharp and on how to train one's mother-in-law. The last line was obviously written by Shobhaa in humor as she quite rightly pointed out; You think I'm joking when I say a mother-in-law can be trained if you know the right tricks? Why not? She is only human. And susceptible to stuff other humans succumb to - flattery, gifts, praise, affection, obedience and respect. Convert her into a monster in your mind and she will become one. Treat her like an adversary and she'll behave like one. Be yourself and the chances are, she'll accept you for who you are sooner or later. Don't play games, don't pretend and don't be a bloody hypocrite. She goes on to give balanced advice to both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law:

Most TV soaps concentrate obsessively on a demonic representation of the species, and most films reinforce it. Women who lunch spend a good part of their afternoon criticizing their own. And harassed husbands complain they can deal with virtually everything else, but not the unending stream of invectives against their mothers. Women should know that it's a lousy habit and should refrain from running the old lady down. The old lady, too, should wake up and smell the coffee, if she thinks today's daughter-in-law is going to meekly follow her dictates. Girls who are in a position to walk rather than suffer do just that or ask to move into their own homes. Meanwhile, there is a happier meeting ground. Since both women are likely to be usefully occupied these days, they can mark out their territories and evolve a system that works for both. Even domestic duties can be shared if
the attitude is right. This is the age of breaking antiquated molds and rules. Power games have no place at home. Mothball your ego and reach out. Though Shobhaa goes on to give further examples of domestic skirmishes and how to resolve them, her advice is simple to both women - stay out of each other's hair, don't compete, don't carry tell tales to the male folks, maintain and respect each other's right to privacy and most of all to the daughters-in-law she admonishes not to go crying to mama whenever one has a fight with her husband or in-laws, in other words deal with your own upheavals and grow up!!

*Spouse*, as I said earlier is a rich storehouse of tips and tricks and deals with a number of important issues on which she hands out sensible and practical advice. (18)

This book, by Shobhaa De, deals with the success, failures, setbacks and joys of married life, enlisting instances of her experiences. As the book says about trust, companionship, affection, sharing and claims to enlist how marriages work and why they fail. Apart from suggestions and learning sessions, what makes this book more interesting is that it opens a window to De’s very own married life which is more real with less frills of drama of high social life. One can easily relate to similar instances in their own life. If we can’t call it a complete guide book of married life then at least it can be taken as a reference book dealing with A to Z issues relating to marriage. It is a collection of the author’s opinion on elements that go into the making of a successful marriage. The book opens De in a more transparent and honest and interesting manner. When it comes to portray of her characters it herself only emerging as the most down to earth, mature, sensitive, emotional and strong person. To provide all the ethos of a married life in such a simple and lucid manner can be done only by Shobhaa De. Fun, savvy and above all, pragmatic, this is the ultimate relationship book for all those who want to make the adventure of marriage last a last lifetime. The author touches almost every major issue in marriage like fights, in-laws, children, physical intimacy, money, household works, almost everything you would be involved with your spouse. The book is, as states in the foreword, more anecdotal, and far more entertaining than the drone of a psychiatrist merely churning out cases of marriages brought back from brink of disaster. *Spouse* is a rich repository, a memoir of Shobhaa De’s life with her husband De, her children, her friends and those that touch her life via work. *Spouse*, as I said earlier is a rich storehouse of tips, tricks and
advice and deals with a number of important issues which she deals with sensible and practical advice

**Shooting from the Hip is a Collection of De’s Columns Dealing with**

**Politics, Travel and Social Issues:**

Out of her colossal collection, a suitable range of Shobhaa De's works has been carefully selected and arranged in this volume. This book covers the versatility of De's writing, be it on politics, media, food, festivals, films, books, people, travelogues, or articles pertaining to her city of joy and pain (Bombay), and much more. As a special bonus, this volume offers the first short story written by De. *A mélange of themes, personalities, random thoughts, all forcefully even colourfully expressed - there is much that is amusing, outrageous, thought-provoking, even shocking.*

*Shooting from the Hip* is a massive compilation of appropriate array beautifully framed by Shobhaa De in the forms of words. This work of Shobhaa De has been vigilantly chosen and prearranged under this volume. This book represents versatile writings nature of Shobhaa De, whether it is be on politics, or on media or may be on films, festivals, books or peoples of Mumbai and its soreness as well as ecstasy. To the lovers of her writings, she has given a short story for very first time to her readers so as to make their reading this time more generous and interesting. This book contains a perfect blend of themes, personalities, arbitrary feelings and all of them are vigorously and vibrantly uttered. There is many more for her readers in this release like of humorous, despicable, provocative and even wicked. This versatile nature of written material under one individual novel provides a better stay and interest because of regularly changing sort of stories.

Shobhaa De has such effectiveness in her writing that she uses to make her reader to read continuously without getting bored. This sort of liveliness what she has in her contents are a results of experiences and deep studies over her topics before getting started. When
she uses to talk about politics, her views are framed in such a way that she binds every kind of reader with her matter. De’s writing is popular because of her capability to get people stick with their readings till last.

The book *Shooting From the Hip*, is very popular throughout the world and has already released worldwide. Like always, this book also made a history of being a best seller in the charts. This De’s writing has been published in many of the regional as well as international languages and has widely accepted by the readers in a same manner in all over the world without any complication of getting real means of book. This kind of writing style is only possible with this amazingly gifted or talented writer, who can make any person, of any region to understand her thoughts simply and can remain them to read it till last by bounding them in her exceptional writing framework. In this book she maintained her style of writing with the variety of topics and stories, again with tremendous frame work and characters included in the novel. Like always, she is got a blast of an appreciation over this edition of diverse stories. (21)

**Shobhaa De’s S’s Secret:**

As a prolific novelist, non-fiction writer, columnist and blogger, there isn't much under the sun that writer Shobhaa De hasn't covered. Fittingly, then, for her sixteenth book, the 61-year-old De has decided to tackle one of her last untouched frontiers: writing for children who are approaching adulthood.

De says the book, entitled *S’s Secret*, which she jokingly calls her 'sweet sixteenth', is geared specifically for today's Young India, which she feels lacks accessible literature that speaks to their issues and concerns.

*It's my first foray into what I call 'tween' writing, the ever-glamorous De says. It was a special challenge, because there is a void there: We don't really have anything for our kids -- as in, Indian kids. What we do have are books about wizards and vampires and goblins. But there's very little to tell them about themselves, or where they can find themselves, or their own voice, or their own experiences. Having raised a fairly large family myself, I thought, 'I've gone through all the teenage angst myself, living it through
my kids.' I think today's tween in India is quite a confused creature, not entirely sure about who they are or what their values are supposed to be, or what's next.

She says her plan was to harness this angst, especially that which is unique to Indian teens, and bring it out into the open for discussion. But, rather than sermonizing and moralizing about it, she decided to approach the subject through fiction. She also believes that Indian teens want to read; it's just that lack of relatable stories drives them away.

Shobhaa De’s first book for children, S’s Secret, published by Popular Prakashan, is the first in the Snappy Happy series. Shobhaa De retains her position as one of the most successful authors on the sub-continent, with ‘S’s Secret’, her 16th title, which is on the way to setting a new record, with five regional language translations due for launch shortly. Reader and trade interest in Ms. De’s very first foray into new territory – writing fiction for teens – is exceedingly high. Known to break new ground and several moulds throughout her long and illustrious writing career, Ms. De has so far explored several literary genres, fiction, non-fiction, TV scripts, etc. Popular Prakashan is proud to launch yet another breakthrough book, this time for young adults looking for a novel that sensitively reflects desi realities. Ms. De’s track record as a best-selling author stays on course with S’s Secret. (22)

At an event to celebrate the book’s success, best-selling author Shobhaa De said that writing the book was a very enjoyable experience for her. I have my own secret – this teen novel about a girl called Sandhya, has been really tough to write. It is my sixteenth book and should have been easy! But it wasn’t, mainly because today’s desi teenager is a complex creature – an interesting mix of modernity and tradition. It took me a while to find Sandhya’s voice. But now that I have it, I am ready to launch Sandhya worldwide. She took me back to my own growing up years even as I connected with the lives of contemporary kids in urban India, who are desperately in search of fictional role models. Here’s hoping that Sandhya will touch a chord in the minds of children across the country.

She adds that dynamics in the Indian family have also changed dramatically since her own youth, a cultural point she hopes to capture in S’s Secret.
I could never have dared to walk up to my dad and say, 'Hey, dad'. It was a very formal relationship. It was very structured. It was very hierarchal. Obedience was something that was just given. I mean there was no question of defying the family -- I did, but that's a different story. But it was not acceptable behaviour. And communication was restricted to what parents wished to communicate. They set the agenda for conversations. Whereas today it's entirely the other way around: its kids who set the agenda. And they are the ones who very often, and quite rightly, tell parents where to get off.

You have to be in sync with what's going on, she continues. There's no point in saying, 'In my time... In my generation...' and so on, because (tweens) don't want to hear it. It's much easier for you to turn in to what they're saying, and pick up the parenting cues from them, rather than forcing anything down their throats.

As for the fast-paced life that many youngsters are getting caught up in, and how parents should respond, De hopes to address it through her series for tweens, of which S's Secret is just the first installment.

S's Secret is an enthralling, engrossing story that will keep both teenagers and most unusually, parents of teenagers, turning the pages! It is a book about love, about trust, about friendship – in fact, about all those universal human values that we take so much for granted. ‘S’ or Sandhya is like any normal Indian teenager. She is that funny, endearing mix of uncertainty, confidence, verve and defiance that one identifies with immediately.

This is Shobhaa De’s first book for children and has all the effervescence, ebullience and excitement that one has come to associate with her writing...

**Shobhaa De’s Starry Nights enlightening on struggling stars:**

*Starry Nights*, is an illustrious novel where the pungent ink of the writer illustrates the various faces of woman. The painful sores of the society are ideally exposed in this novel while making *Starry Nights* a matchless anecdote of the modern society.
Starry Nights portrays the story of Aasha Rani and Akshay that is based on a real life love story of two pairs of celluloid stars. (23) It was a best seller in India after which Shobhaha De became the house name for a special class of people. The central character in starry nights is Asha rani. She is dark sweet girl from Chennai. She is trying hard to become a film star. Her amma instigated her to be in the film world by hook or by crook. When she was fifteen years she used to sleep with Kishenbhai, one film producer to get the chance in film. He sponsored one film for her and also helped her to get the appropriate persons to get the roles. In the process Kishenbhai falls in love with Ashs Rani but it was too late as she already gets engaged with Akhshay Arora who was a famous bollywood star rather sex symbol. Asha Rani sent her amma back to Chennai when one day she tries to stop Akshay to bit Asha. In later days Akshay gets bored with Asha and as he was married returns back to his wife. (24) The worst part is the actor reveals in one of the leading magazine that Asha is a pornographic actress and he doesn`t want to do any role with her. Eventually she gets attached to Sheth Amirchand, a Member of Parliament and starts working under his control. After some days she goes to Chennai to do an art film. But her love for Akshay is still there so she tries to rekindle it. Then she gets frustrated after knowing that his love for her is only because of her stardom. She attempts suicide but failed to do so. In the process she married a New Zealander named Jay and had a child with him. (25) Eventually Akshay gets AIDS because of his lifestyle. Asha returned to New Zealand and finally after many incidents decides to come back to India and make Sasha, Asha Rani`s daughter a prospering film star. Starry Nights is the story of a high-class society, which often seems abnormal to some people. Shobhaha De`s unique writing style uncovers the sores and wounds of the society somewhat mercilessly. This is a piece by Shobhaha De which portrays the dark corners of film industry that can be informative in some cases. (26)

**Shobhaha De`s Novels and Corporate World: A Feminist Study**

Women`s contribution to work was started way back during the First World War, when they represented and worked alongside men and actively participated in rendering their services to the country. Not only they performed their work wholeheartedly, but they were also applauded by everyone for their dedicated service. The entry of women into the
professional world was seen as a threat to the patriarchal system who opined that a woman should render her service to the society as a wife, mother or a daughter. If they indulged in coming out of their house and working outside, they would never be able to do justice to their role. In an attempt to stop them from going to work, they were alleged with immoralities and thereby posing threat to the stable family lives. (27) This was one of the major reasons for the rise of Feminist Movement.

_Feminism_ is a movement which advocated for establishing and defending equal rights for women. It aims at providing political, economic and social rights to them. The activists who fight for these rights are called as feminists. They have campaigned tirelessly for women’s rights in the field of contracts, property, voting rights and also reproductive rights. _The Feminist Movement_ opposed domestic violence, sexual harassment etc. (28) Feminists have fought for providing workplace rights which included providing equal pay package and opportunities for enhancing their careers to be successful entrepreneurs.

Shobhaa De is a writer who has actively participated in _Feminist Movement_ without being called herself as a feminist. She says wisely: _I write with a great deal of empathy towards women without waving the feminist flag._

The role of women is undergoing a massive dramatic change worldwide. Women today have succeeded in sharing podium alongside men in almost all fields. Women have joined hands to hands in becoming team leaders, CEOs, managers in the corporate world etc. However, the number of women in managerial positions is still alarmingly low which may be due to various factors. For example, women find it more comfortable to stick to their roles as homemaker and for this reason they are ready to quit their jobs if it’s the demand of their family. Secondly, maternity leave also poses another reason for their discontinuity in their jobs. As a result of which very few women succeed in getting the top positions in the corporate world. (29)

Shobhaa De writes mostly about urban elite women and has effectively highlighted their problems. She has got the mind with the sharpness of an eagle which has captured the plight of women in corporate world. Shobhaa De has vehemently opposed the gender discrimination in workplace and has advocated for equivalence of power shared between
both men and women. New Indian women who have already attained economic independence are a breed apart from others. They enjoy economic independence and their attitude is characterized by a rare seriousness. In Blogspot.com’s article, *Independent Woman, What a Laugh*, dated Aug 24th, 2010, she wrote, *Our conversation was restricted to children, cooking and maids.* (All these were declared hazardous to health, more so than cigars and booze) She further writes that this conversation was not between bored or pampered housewives, but it was between first class corporate professionals who earned approximately same, if not more than their husbands. Still they were cribbing about traditional household domestic issues that belonged to their grandmother’s era. \(^{(30)}\)

According to Shobhaa De, women in business are not given much importance even though they wore business suits to their workplace and carried burgundy coloured brief cases and they took their jobs on earnestness that was almost terrifying in its intensity by men. In fact work interests for women have become fashionable. A working woman, who hails from middle class background but now has got a job in corporate sector can surrender her pay packet to her mother-in-law and feel guilty about the smallest personal expenses that she does without telling her family. \(^{(31)}\) Yet her observation is *Shakti* is destructive as well as a creative force and the maintenance of equilibrium between the low opposing forces which can lead to creative and dynamic harmony. Shobhaa De has stated in *Shooting From the Hip The very concept of the sexes locked in external battle is negative and destructive.* She makes this interesting and truthful remark that there will be complacent, placed woman and a freak, docile man, the quarrel is not to reach the top of the human heap, and stay there but about the race being run in fair terms and without weighted handicaps.

*Socialite Evenings* gives us the picture of marginalization of Indian working woman at the hands of their husbands. The heroines of Shobhaa De’s novels are not only protagonists, but they are also the monetary contributors to their family as well as in the society, who initiate and regulate their own lives as well as the lives of others. Such is Karuna’s (*Socialite Evenings*) confidence over work and this is Shobhaa De’s attitude for Work. The writer is genuine enough to reason out that women need not depend on anyone for their luxuries. \(^{(32)}\) Shobhaa De’s novels are inhabited by high class working
women professionals who are not at all sensitive in their emotions and thoughts. They are very much interested to gain materialistic benefits like solitaires, cars, clothes for which they know that they need to earn money and are quite well aware of their own economic independence instead of asking their husbands or boyfriends to pay for these materialistic demands. Shobhaa De has very sensibly stated in *Surviving Men* in this way:

*Yes, we know money is power. The person who controls the purse strings plays grand puppeteer. If the wife is wealthier, she is the one who makes her husband beg for pocket money.*

Eventually everything is arrived at activating power, fame, and money i.e. the materialistic gains. Women can’t be independent unless they are economically self sufficient. A woman needs to be financially sound, she should then only be able to assert her dominance in any field, be it industry, films, corporate sector etc. In this way she won’t be dependent on any of her male counterparts whether it’s her husband or her brother. An independent mind is meaningless if the body and soul is in the custody of someone else. According to Shobhaa De, corporate women suffer from both sides without knowing how to react. If they give time for their career, they are charged of being a ‘hardcore’. If they ask for some liberty in timing, they are accused of being too demanding by their bosses and if they give up their career to focus on their family, husbands and children, their husbands totally object about their wives hanging around at home and enjoying all the perks while contributing nothing to the family’s income. Women accept that if they give up their job and concentrate on their family, they are openly criticized by their husbands and sometimes their in-laws instead of being appreciated for their gratitude.

Shobhaa De was at a seminar which was meant for addressing issues faced by women professionals, many working women voiced disappointment at their husbands’ indifference attitude towards their wives. They expect women to please their mothers, look after their kids, manage all the household work and at the same time contribute to the family’s income. They have to postpone having babies because they are not sure their job will be intact after their maternity leave as they fear another female colleague who is
single, would take over the temporarily vacated post and they are thrown away from their jobs. Sometimes they are forced to work under a junior colleague after resuming their duties from their maternity leave and they find that all their years of work have gone waste. Man wants a dynamo draped in sexy contour- as Shobhaa De calls it. Men want their women to be smart enough to handle their business as well, be good and nice in cutting their deals. She says that family needs extra income, and men alone can’t cope up with it so the pressure on working women mounts up to a large extent. She has to be indeed a superwoman to handle all these works at the same time.

Shobhaa De’s ideology of working women is very closely related to Vivekananda who believe that women were far more sufficient and not merely anatomical showpieces or coveted objects protected and confined within four walls of homes or emotional windbags likely to be deflected at the slightest prick. Vivekananda considered women as manifestation of protection, source of power, sustaining humanity with characteristic chain and dignity. De rejects sexual discrimination and gives her women dignity and individuality that’s justifiably deserved by them. The novel *Sisters* deals with the struggle that a woman, Mallika had to face after she got a chance to run a business empire that she had acquired by chance after the sudden demise of her father. She faced stiff oppositions from her own employees like Ramankaka who always tried to make things difficult for her. *Sisters* deals with a woman’s struggle for identity in a male dominated society. After her father Seth Hiralal’s death Mallika found that loans were as high as 80 crores, licenses were acquired under mysterious situations. Mallika tries to reform herself to be a much matured woman and face the world after her parents’ death. She behaves in a very calm way not in haste for giving decisions to her employees. She chooses her business attire very carefully which included her accessories as well. She becomes responsible and tries not to fall into any kind of trap. Like most of Shobhaa De’s women characters do, Mallika takes company’s decisions by herself without taking anybody’s help. One such example is to include Shanay, her cousin in her company despite vehement oppositions from Ramnabhai. She showed her industrial capability by appointing him because he was very faithful and trustworthy as well as sincere. She knew that Shanay was madly in love with him and he would leave no stone unturned to please him at any cost. To induct him meant she would own his sincerity and faithfulness. She
got what she wanted when Shanay showed her a report which indicated that Seth Hiralal was murdered. The writer Shobhaa De has portrayed a serious, matured, committed and a workaholic character in Mallika Hiralal in Sisters. Ramankaka suggested her that he should be consulted in all her decisions about business transactions, but it’s Mikki, who holds the key to decisions because she knows that ‘the corporate world is full of sharks and gets victory when she declares: Thank you for your advice, Ramankaka. I appreciate and value your words. But I’d like you to have few of mine now. I can’t change my sex, unfortunately….. But can change most about everything else…. And I intend to….. This is going to be my show and I intend running it on my own terms.’

She isn’t emotional, subdued and weak personality as far as professionalism is concerned. Rather she is intelligent and confident. She breaks off her engagement with Naveen immediately without giving a second thought when talks fail, in a meeting related to the takeover of her industry which was in great financial crisis. Shobhaa De believes that Indian women have changed quantitatively. They are a part of the modern world and are ready for the new millennium. If a woman is self sufficient, she hardly bothers about getting married and leading a life being dominated by the patriarchal system. She is bold, daring and ambitious. In Shooting from the Hip, De writes: The terms underlying marriage have been redefined in recent terms. If a self sufficient woman, with a roof over, has chosen to marry, it’s because she wants to share her life with someone in the fullest sense and not because she is looking for a life- long ticket. Divorce too has got to be viewed in this light. A woman of independent means is not compelled to perpetuate a bad marriage because she has nowhere to go.

Even though the emerging class of working women has acquired the long denied respect, prestige, and also freedom, yet Indian women face certain problems arising out of their dual responsibilities. The entire earning is accepted, no doubt, but the change in life pattern is not welcomed too eagerly by the family members. The household responsibilities are still considered as the duty of the women. As a result majority of working women in Shobhaa De’s novels face adjustment problem. This idea of the writer is clearly mentioned in Surviving Men where she writes:
I bring as much money as he does. I work equally for long hours. I hate when he offers me to fix dinner. What does he mean by ‘help’? It’s such a presumptuous word. It indicates that he has assumed making dinner is solely my responsibility……and he is being kind enough to share some of it with me. We both have to feed ourselves. As far as I am concerned, he does his bit and I do mine. It’s a joint effort. No favours. (38)

The popularity of the novels of Shobhaa De is her own way of saying men to watch out. Women are not those who can only sit at home. They can also acquire name, fame and status like men. Her women are highly challenging, educated and assertive. They go in for high flying career like modeling, high power business, journalism and advertising. They can keep a string of men tied under their belt so that when one fails to live up to their expectations, they can move on to the next. The novels mainly deal with the urban women with metropolis as the setup, their challenges, predicament, values and lifestyle.

In Socialite Evenings, the protagonist, Karuna had an early marriage and gets a divorce because she gets bored with the life of a housewife. She did her first modeling for a newspaper and got a tight slap from her conservative father but that slap didn’t stop her from continuing with her further modeling assignments. She feels very sad when she was being left out of all the conversations between her husband and her mother-in-law. Karuna realizes that an Indian woman’s life is an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left. (39) The protagonist in this novel, Karuna believes in I am the good thing attitude. Here ‘I’ is a good thing because it can be dressed up and presented as an extremely marketable product over the media. Karuna tries to show how Indian women are made to tolerate and denied to live as an individual. This is clarified when she speaks:

I am made to feel obliged and in debt. It’s awful but even my insistence on working and contributing to the running expenses of the house have become a battleground. (40) She goes on to win the Ad Club Award for the ensuing year. She prefers to be a free lance ad writer with freedom. She starts making ad films as well as succeeds in becoming a modern independent woman. This was indeed her dream of achieving professional success. The writer has depicted Karuna as a very capable woman who is strong enough to circumvent her lot in life and launch into the kind of lifestyle of modeling which is still
not acceptable with orthodox Indian families. Karuna becomes financially self dependent, craves her own niche in the professional and competitive world of advertising, thereby asserting her independence. It’s highly significant that Shobhaa De’s novels deal with Indian woman’s challenges, predicament, values and lifestyle. She has independent thoughts with a very independent mind. She thinks no matter if a woman is married, or in a very steady relationship, yet she needs to be financially independent. At least she should be able to earn for herself and for this education is a must. A woman should have minimum education to earn a living and prevent herself from being exploited in the hands of men.

Corporate world according to Shobhaa De is rich, powerful and self-centered. A woman has to struggle on her own without anybody’s help to climb the ladder of success.

Aparna in Snapshots is a corporate woman who is the owner of an ad agency employing many people in her industry. She had to face stiff opposition from her outside and even her husband deserted her at the most crucial time when she needed him the most. Even then she stood up and faced all odds bravely. She had clever employees like Prem who knew how to get things done from her which she tells him on his face while they were on a pleasure trip to the beaches of Goa:

*You work for me because I pay you top dollar, more than your market value. Let’s face it. You’ve priced yourself out of the job bazaar.*

Aparna was a very headstrong woman who knew how to handle employees like Prem. However she was completely a different person when it came to love and marriage. Aparna in Snapshots had married Rohit because they had many things in common. Both loved sporting long hair, jeans and kurtis, and even they shared same star sign- Gemini. However things changed drastically after marriage with frequent quarrels and it was Aparna who had to surrender meekly always to Rohit. *He erred- she forgave. It was taken for granted that all differences were to be settled in just one way- his. And each time they fought, it was Aparna who was left feeling rotten and vaguely guilty as though the whole thing was somehow her fault; that it was her intensity that came in the way and spoilt everything; that it was she who expected too much, demanded too much, that men*
were supposed to be a hundred percent honest, or sincere, that it was unrealistic of her to hope for that with Rohit. Wives, she often heard were better off being somewhat different. Husbands preferred that to an obsessive interest in their lives.\(^{(42)}\)

Aparna loved Rohit maddeningly enough to leave him for a moment. She was asked not to put any questions on him by Rohit. He even told her to stop looking at her with a suspicious look. No interference in his matters or no curiosity about what he was doing. She obeyed him and taught herself not to interfere or put any questions on him. She was a shattered woman by then running errands for him, getting drinks for him and his friends after setting the dinner table ready for them. Ultimately her marriage culminated and Rohit walked out of his life. Rohit left her with allegations that she was responsible for all the separation and she was finally deserted by Rohit. The separation was too hard to bear for Aparna. She spent days after days, time after time thinking about where things could go wrong between them. Finally, she thought that it was because Rohit didn’t want to take the responsibilities of a family. Marriage was okay but when she wanted to have a baby, he was casual about the topic and said; ‘Why do you want to spoil it all? This is perfect. I am enjoying life. I am busy. You are busy. Let’s forget the kids.’\(^{(43)}\)

While portraying Aparna and Rohit’s relationship, the writer Shobhha De has spoken about the Indian prejudices still prevailing in the Indian culture which is completely male oriented and male dominated. Women are expected and taught to obey meekly to their husbands. They are made to dance to the tunes of their husbands without questioning. If they revolt, they would either be harassed, or tortured physically or mentally or deserted. This is elaborately depicted in the character of Aparna, who obliges, accepts willingly to all the terms and conditions and even the blames and the accusations and the allegations put forth by her husband. She concludes herself that maybe she had expected too much out of this marriage. Maybe she failed to give enough time to her home and her husband being a working woman. Shobhha De believes that life is very fast in cosmopolitan cities.\(^{(44)}\) With increase in career scopes and openings, women are employed in large number of IT and ITES sectors and corporate organizations. It’s very easy to enter into a relationship with a colleague or someone else. As a result of their relationship, dating becomes a very common thing and an intimate physical relationship can’t be ruled out
between these couples. Everything is very fast and before giving themselves a chance to think about the other, they get married. However after marriage they expect the same coziness, passion, love, tenderness to be there from their respective partners always which can never happen. They remain in the fantasy world without coming to the reality or being realistic. This leads to constant fights, misunderstandings and finally separation from each other. This kind of relationship lacks empathy between the couples. After getting divorced, they are in search of a new boyfriend or a girlfriend. It takes no time to forget about their past affair, relationship or even marriage. Even if one is very serious or emotional, the other partner doesn’t give him/her a chance of any kind of compromise.

Shobhhaa De has talked of power game in her book *Spouse- the Truth About Marriage* where she has mentioned that the worst power game involved is the ego. She has categorically said that an egoist partner is an unpleasant partner. She may not be sexist; she has found man to be far more ego driven in a relationship compared to a woman. It’s a traditionally accepted concept that women are taught to accept as subordinate position than man within marriage. Power has always rested with the husband and if the wife had a problem (even a genuine one) situation can be very bad and it can go to the extent of separation. But with change in time, women became financially independent, contributed equally or even more to the family income. In that situation, woman refuse to surrender completely by prostrating themselves at their dear *patidev’s* feet. There are also examples where the reverse role has taken place like men looking after the home as homemaker and women going for work to earn a living for the two of them as well as the family. In this situation, women assert themselves and they try to play the role of the boss in the house which results in game becoming lethal because men don’t want to change their role from boss to slave and very strong financially independent women refuse to accept the supremacy of their unemployed husbands. Most men like to consolidate their power at home and it’s very unlikely that they share their power with their wife. They opine that, *I’m the husband, the ultimate boss and I must be obeyed.* However Shobhhaa De suggests that there should be respect because respect is the foundation of every relationship and it can’t be ruled out in a marriage as well but respect should be from both the sides. Each should respect the other no matter what is his or her financial status. A wife who constantly challenges her husband’s authority in public exposes her own loop
holes. It’s absolutely not necessary that one should put one’s life partner down to elevate one’s status. \(^{(46)}\)

All women in every class of society face similar problems. Shobhaa De instills self confidence in the minds of women by advocating economic independence for them by which they can make themselves useful to the family and contribute to the family’s income which could also be responsible in reducing the expectations to a great extent.

Once she spoke on an occasion of *International Women’s Day* in Allahabad where she was invited as a guest speaker: *Wine and Cigarettes don’t make a modern woman. In the attitude that matters in the rest, to say the least are pseudo projections most unimpressive.* \(^{(47)}\)

Thus we see that women’s contribution to the corporate world has been significantly improving and Shobhaa De has been successful enough to explore the feminist cause and her portrayal of the corporate world is worth noting. She has been very successful in highlighting the problems faced by them and their attitude towards work, family and marriage. Therefore she has emphasized upon the fact that women empowerment is a must for each and every woman and the women must stand up to fight for their cause and they shouldn’t be discriminated on the basis of their sex. \(^{(48)}\)

**Does self-actualization motivates the heroines of Shobhaa De?**

Shobhaa De’s novels mirror the life styles of the elite and the middle classes; the middle class trying to search its identity in the aristocratic life-style of the elites, on the one hand and, probing into the human-relationships in these classes on the other. She is hardly concerned with the men in the society, as she does not nourish a good view of Indian males. She thinks they still live in the sixteenth century. So, a big reason she does not let her father-characters to come in the way of her heroines. De uses female protagonists, a shadow of her own, in her novels. She is intelligent enough to realize that a woman understands another woman better than anybody else. She has herself come across differing personalities in her life and has acted out varying roles. De accepts that she was hardly interested in studies. Nothing was definitely planned in life. Disregarding her
family’s objections, she entered modeling, and then turned to advertisements, and after finding it tasteless she edited *Stardust*. Later she took up scriptwriting and became an authoress. Years back, as a model she had accepted in an interview published in *Femina* that the ambition of her life was to get married and reproduce children. And she had six children. She shared the atmosphere of the middle, as well as the elite classes. She tears their lives open to the readers. Nisha (*Sultry Days*) comes from a well to do family, Karuna (*Socialite Evenings*) comes from a middle class family, Anjali (*Socialite Evenings*) comes from a conservative Jain family, Aasha Rani (*Starry Nights*) comes from a small town near Bombay and becomes sweet-heart of millions and Mallika (*Sisters*) belongs to a very rich family. The reader meets other characters through these speakers. De has faithfully portrayed the diversity in the feminine world through her female characters like Nisha. She has scrutinized their individual approaches to life and its challenges. The narrator, not only delineates the plights of all the major actors, but also occasionally throws a light on the views and philosophy of De herself. As for *Sultry Days*, it is in most parts autobiographical. A quotation by Booth on the art of reading is worth quoting here. He says,

> . . . the author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader, he makes his reader as he makes his second self and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader can find complete agreement. De is conscious of the characters she creates. She is aware that they belong to some fantastic or unreal world having no roots in this world in which she herself shares an existence. Nisha, as her spokeswoman, comments on the unrealities people she has observed and describes them in great details. While moving in the human society, her heroines interact with different members of different sections, who live with their own idiosyncrasies and self-created realities. Thus a society plays a major role in the life of man, so in the life of the heroines. Yet it cannot be generalized that the way De thinks and speaks of love and marriage is that what all Indian women think, still she serves as the background in her novels. De was not what she is. She accepts that with her life everything has kept changing. She kept moving from one role and status to another. She began with imperfections and reached satisfaction in her own life. Her protagonists whether Nisha, Aasha Rani, Mikki or Alisha also search for satisfaction in their lives.
As already quoted above, all the major characters of De come from middle or elite classes, unsurprisingly, their physiological needs, i.e., hunger, thirst, sleep are satisfied. As for sex, Nisha (*Sultry Days*) observes her experiences with Iqbal, the painter as, the man’s hunger for beautiful girls matched his thirst for tea. He loved both equally. He thinks of a model’s body as a canvas for his painting and Nisha gets disillusioned with his thinking and thereby with sex. De’s novels share a large portion of their plots with this need. Mallika and Alisha share the same fate in *Sisters*. Mallika gets economic freedom after her parent’s death. Economically strong, she tries to make amends for her father’s wrongdoings. But being inexperienced and newly liberated young woman, without any guidance gets many bumps in her elite society. On the point of marriage or within family relations, nearly all of De’s characters are either disillusioned or frustrated. Sexual relations are enjoyed mechanically, just for pleasure, as part of life but never for love. The age old religious institution of Hindus are seen decaying. De makes her heroines search love in sexual relations, that too, in other man’s bedroom, never in their own bedroom or in their own families. Parents, brothers and sisters do not even play a passive role in her plots. The characters, more or less enjoy economic security. They await no anxieties and dangers on the economic front. But in the third stage they get blocked. The meaning of true love and belongingness is not clear to them. Relations are professional or full of jealousy but never of love. Parents are strict but rarely capable to guide their daughters to the right path. De’s characters seek perfection in others without going for it in themselves. They care for what is wrong with others, never correcting their own mistakes. Thus frustration, boredom and loneliness come in their share. All have their own ways of asserting individualities. It is a fact that De presents the women in their true colours in her novels. They all are from among ourselves; we only need to see ourselves more carefully. She talks about the woman, suffering, and suffering because of her own family or because of her own desires, and yet she does not understand herself, her place in the society.⁵¹

She has choices but she behaves like an immature person depending on others to make choice for her and as a result she suffers. Thus she never attains the real self actualization, even if she attains it, it is either too late or she has lost everything that is most valuable in life.
As Shobhaa De describes various characters making love and sex, talking sex, she uses that type of lingo. Nothing is behind curtain. She calls a spade a spade. It is a fact that people use such language in the day-to-day conversation. While using such language, the author successfully creates real characters. It is her style that has made her a popular fictionist. Shobhaa De has a special knack to describe places. In Second Thoughts she describes Bombay and Calcutta: Example Bombay smells well so did Calcutta but it was a different smell. Besides she was used to that particular stench. Bombay smelt of desperation and deceit. For example Maya took a few tentative steps forward and recoiled in horror. She had almost tripped over a figure lying prone on the platform. She looked down to see it was a man, and he was dead. None of the thousands of people nonchalantly walking past the corpse so much as paused (Prologue). Here the author uses figure of speech personification. Bombay is personified as an emotionless metro where careless citizens live. In the same novel, the author makes use of another figure of speech-metaphor. As Maya is talking to her neighbor Pushpa, the soup, which she was cooking spills on the stove in the kitchen. Her husband reprimands Maya. At this time Maya ponders: Example My entire body was shaking with mirth. The more I stared at the spilled soup, the funnier I found it. I knew I would have to make it again from the scratch. So what? I have all the time in the world now. (52) This incident provides a beautiful metaphor. The soup is spilled (her affair with Nikhil is broken as he is engaged to a Delhi girl). She will cook another soup (It means that she will make another affair with any other Nikhil or Shakeel because now she has all the time in the world). Once Nikhil initiated her in extra-marital relationship there may not be Nikhil, she will carry on with anyone available. Shobhaa De exposes not only the minds of her characters but also their bodies. She depicts naked minds with naked bodies. This could be done only by De because it is De's diction and style. The heroines of Second Thoughts, Sultry Days and Socialite Evenings - Maya, Nisha and Karuna respectively, narrate their own stories. This narration is made acutely and pointedly by the author. Sometimes her characters become her mouth pieces as if De herself is speaking through their mouths. For example, a conversation is going on between Swati and Aparna in Snapshots. Swati comments: Sex isn’t filthy, our minds make it so. Look at Khajuraho, Konark. Fascinating! It is a pity we got brainwashed by some frustrated, repressed bigots. I think sex is a celebration-the
highest form of religion (p.164). In this way there are many incidents that the author speaks through her characters while discussing various social, political, marital, male-female and filmy issues. While writing any novel, as there are seven to her credit, Shobhaa De puts her soul into it. She writes from head as well as from heart. So her style becomes direct, forceful, brief, clear and bare. And hence it is also explosive. It a fact, that De presents the women in their true colours in her novels. They all are from among ourselves; we only need to see ourselves more carefully. She talks about the woman, suffering; suffering because of her own family or because of her own desires, and yet she does not understand herself, her place in the society. She has choices but she behaves like an immature person depending on others to make choice for her and as a result she suffers. Thus, she never attains the real self actualization, even if she attains it, it is either too late or she has lost everything that is most valuable in life. (53)

The varied roles of women in Shobhaa De’s novels:

Shobhaa De has been many things to many people: a super model, celebrity journalist, magazine editor, columnist, wife, mother, social commentator and TV scriptwriter. Most of her books are the best sellers as she realistically projects the image of the upper-class woman in contemporary India. She has an extraordinary ability to discuss the very sensitive aspects of human relationship in general and man-woman relationship in particular. In other words, the time tested populist ingredient of sex and a tempestuous style contributed to her making as one of the most popular novelists today. Shobhaa De believes in a very frank narration of incidents and openheartedness. Nothing is reserved in her fiction. It is in this respect Shobhaa De differs considerably from other Indian women novelists in English. Since we seek to explore and explicate overall images of women appeared in her novels, it is a fascinating study from the Indian point of view. Here more emphasis is on the image of woman with critical comments regarding the new emerging woman of modern cosmopolitan India. She portrays a variety of women from the traditional, subjugated and marginalized to the extremely modern and liberated women.
The Image of Subjugated and Marginalized Woman:

Shobhaa De has portrayed the image of subjugated and marginalized women in her novels with an emphasis on men’s pride, incompatible marriages, traditional norms of behaviour and patriarchal social system as the real forces of the oppression and exploitation of women. Shobhaa De’s novels are a slice of urban life. In her novels she realistically presents an intimate side of urban woman’s life and also reveals her plight in the present day society. It is a fact that woman is victimized and subjugated by the male community everywhere. She has been the subordinate sex and has to conform to male standards. In most of her novels, Shobhaa De has focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society. She draws our attention to women’s exploitation, discrimination and commodification. The women are treated with double standard. Subjugation and marginalization are the vital factors in their lives. They are never regarded as autonomous beings. Karuna, the protagonist of Socialite Evenings, is the perfect example of the misery of women in India. She suffers due to the callous and non-responsive attitude of her husband. Her husband treats her as a mere object subjected to his will as a result there is a complete loss of her identity. Similarly, Anjali, a young socialite, also suffers much because of her incompatible marriage and her husband’s oppressive attitude. Here, in presenting the picture of subordination and marginalization of Indian women, Shobhaa De’s attack is not against the individuals, it is against the system that favours men and causes women’s subjugation and marginalization. In Starry Nights Shobhaa De has projected the shattering of human values in this glittering world of Mumbai cinema through the realistic portrayal of Aasha Rani, Geetha Devi, Malini and Rita. The other important aspect which Shobhaa De highlights in this and other novels is a woman’s role in the oppression and suffering of her fellow woman. In our society, women ill-treat and exploit women instead of showing love, respect and understanding for their own sex. As a matter of fact, Shobhaa De brings out the universal psychological truth that the woman is the enemy of the woman. In Sisters Mikki Hiralal is oppressed, subjugated and exploited by Binny Malhotra, a true representative of patriarchal system. The novel Strange Obsession revolves around the lesbian relationship between Meenakshi Iyengar called ‘Minx’ and Amrita, the model from Delhi. This
novel deals more with how one woman subjugates the other woman than the subjugation of women by men. *Sultry Days* has a male protagonist, God who says to Nisha that “one bitch is as good as another” (252). His attitude towards girls is— “use them and leave them”. Such attitude of men towards women clearly shows the miserable plight and marginalization of women in our society. In *Snapshots* the women turn into useful plaything for men in patriarchal society. The ruling ideology that favours men prompts these women to fall prey to the designs of men. All the men presented in the novel are tyrants whereas the women – Aparna, Rashmi, Swati and Noor are all victims of male tyranny. Finally, the novel *Second Thoughts*, is a sad tale of Maya, an oppressed wife. She suffers from marital disharmony because her husband Ranjan considers woman as a mere object. Though an engineer, Maya is not allowed to take up even a part-time job. Instead, her husband again and again reminds her of ‘tradition’. It is due to Ranjan’s traditional attitude and feeling of superiority, Maya feels herself trapped in a neglected and meaningless life. (56)

**The Image of Rebellious Woman:**

Here Shobhaa De deals with the image of rebellious women and their varied ways of protest against their oppression and marginalization. As a result of their exploitation and subjugation, to assert their identity, these women turn rebellious. There is a transformation on their part. Now they are aware of their rights and hence revolt against the traditional norms and fight for equality in the male-dominated Indian society. As a feminist writer, Shobhaa De’s novels raise a strong protest against the male-dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom to act and live according to their will. In this fast changing world, the role of women in the society too, has been changing fast, affecting greatly the sexual mores and social norms prevalent in the society. Shobhaa De reacts against the male culture and strongly detests the marginalization of women. She is the first to explore the world of urban women of higher social strata. In urban area male hegemony is no longer acceptable as women have started thinking for themselves. De’s novels reveal her protest against the image of woman as an auxiliary. She destroys this distorted image of woman and therefore, the female characters in her novels appear more powerful than men. The journey of Karuna in *Socialite Evenings*, is a
journey from a middle-class girl to a self-sufficient woman. Her entry in the glamorous world of modeling and friendship with Bunty, are the acts of rebellion. After marriage she establishes extra-marital relationship with Krish, revolts against her insensitive husband and finally divorces him. She also rejects the ideas of her second marriage. She does not want to conform to the traditional image of woman anymore. The women such as Karuna, Anjali and Ritu attempt to destroy the gender discrimination – the real source of women’s oppression. The women in Starry Nights, in one way or the other, are related to the world of films. Aasha Rani, ‘Sweetheart of the millions’, breaks all sexual mores and social norms by her unusual and deviant behaviour. Nothing controls her desire to live a life of her own. Her sexual encounters with different men point out her sexual aggression. She defeats men at their own game, and demolishes the mythical image of woman imposed by patriarchy. According to De sex is the bedrock of all relationships. Her women: Aasha Rani, Rita, Linda, Shonali and others frankly discuss and practice sex. They are bold and rebellious who protest against their exploitation and strive to assert their identity. The concept of morality arising out of love for one and the same person is out-dated. This is well illustrated by Shobhaa De’s Sisters. The protagonist Mikki in her journey from a silent sufferer to a hard rebel breaks all the age-old moral codes of the male-dominated world. She does not appear emotional or sentimental even on the death of her parents like the traditional Indian woman do. Both Mikki and Alisha are not weak ladies of manners. On the contrary, they are pragmatic and as strong and efficient as man. The modern Indian woman, who is at the centre of Shobhaa De’s novels is not passive in nature. She protests strongly against the force in male-dominated world, which threaten her very individuality. Strange Obsession is Shobhaa De’s rebellious novel. It highlights the lesbian relationship between Meenakshi Iyengar (Minx) and Amrita Aggarwal. Lesbianism itself is a threat to heterosexuality. (57)

In Sultry Days, she presents a group of modern women who, when ill-treated, turn rebellious and protest. Nisha’s mother protests against her husband’s affair with his Sindhi secretary. Sujata is another woman who does not lead a life which is defined by her husband. She makes her own rules. She has both male and female lovers. Further, the get-together of six former school friends at Reema’s house in Snapshots also reveals how the women are obsessed with sex and sensual enjoyment. They express their grievances
against men in general and husbands in particular. They break the social norms and moral codes. Most of the women in the novel, bored with their husbands, seek new relationships outside marriage and challenge the patriarchal system. In fact, Snapshots is the world of Shobhaa De’s women, where men stand on periphery and women fight for power and supremacy. Finally, it is through the story of love and betrayal in Second Thoughts, that Shobhaa De exposes the hollowness and hypocrisy of Indian marriage system. Maya, the central character is so depressed and frustrated by the traditional attitude of her husband Ranjan that soon she establishes an extra-marital relationship with Nikhil and at last breaks the long silence. (58)

Thus Shobhaa De says: Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish qualification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrument in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind. Shobhaa De destroys this distorted and deteriorated image of woman and therefore, the female characters in her novels appear more powerful than men. She shatters the complementary image of a woman to man to highlight disharmony in marital relationship. No doubt, women need the companionship of men to satisfy their natural urge, but De’s women are bold and sexually liberated. They establish as a strategy for social and financial benefits. Marriage for them is just a matter of convenience, completely devoid of an emotional attachment. In this regard, Betty Friedan (1971: 282) expresses following view:

For a woman, as for a man, the need for self-fulfillment autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization - is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted. Woman’s sexual problems are, in this sense, by-products of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfill her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminine fulfillment ignores.

De’s women have a typical sexual behaviour as a way of protest and try to establish an autonomous identity. In this respect, Shobhaa De differs from other Indian women novelists who have portrayed rural, self-sacrificing and traditional women. Contrasts to this, Shobhaa De’s women are bold, rebellious and at the same time actively involved
with the changing roles life has offered to them. They protest against their exploitation in society and strive to assert their identity. They are the women of substance. The upper class women in India, in recent years have outgrown the taboos about extra-marital relationship. They are no more prudes or modest in public. In fact, the concept of morality arising out of love for one and the same person is out-dated. This is well illustrated by Shobhaa De in *Sisters*. De projects the glamorous images of the attractive, independent and highly professional women trying to dominate the power structure. It is the most important issue that she deals with in her novels. It is the desire to dictate and direct the action and thinking of others, which is uppermost in human psychology. Shobhaa De writes: 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 own potential and power. Shakti needs to be harnessed, directed and explored for the furtherance of over all human development. The very concept of the sexes locked in eternal battle is negative and destructive ... when one talks of shakti unleashed, one also remembers the two connotations of shakti – the destructive avtaar is as potent as the creative one. It is in maintaining the state of equilibrium between these two opposing forces that can lead to creative and dynamic harmony.... Man will have to come to terms with woman power.

De’s novels stress the value of equivalence of power. Whenever this balance disturbs, there is tension and hypocrisy in society. However, Shobhaa De differs considerably from the other women novelists regarding her views about love, sex and marriage. Some of her women characters appear as hypocrites because real life situation is not reflected in their life styles. Even they do not represent the whole female community in India. They are only from the urban society. They are not the masses but only the creamy members of fashionable Mumbai society. Furthermore, De is very candid in describing sex and sexual acts. She attempts to show a change which is taking place in the contemporary society. Each woman in the novel desires for power enjoys power and fights to control power. The women realize that their power lies in their sexuality. In this context, sex no longer remains limited to the body rather it stands for power. Men do not want to control female sexuality just to satisfy their physical needs. Instead, their lust for female body
signifies their urge to have power over women, even a brothel-owner like Champabai realizes this game of power, who says to Rashmi: *Never give yourself to any man for free. You know why? Men don’t value anything they get so easily. That is why we are here: to satisfy their lust, not for sex but power. Power over women, power over us – you and me. If they buy your sex, pay for you, they feel like kings. Give it to them with love for nothing and they will kick you in the gut.* (61) Shobhaa De introduces economic aspects of power struggle. Eventually, she says (1994: 110); *everything boils down to money – that great leveler. There can be no talk of independence for women, without economic self-sufficiency. An independent mind or free spirit is meaningless so long as the body and soul are being kept together by somebody else.* De projects the glamorous images of the attractive, independent and highly professional women trying to dominate the power structure. It is the most important issue that she deals with in her novels. It seems that Shobhaa De’s women are empowered by their sexuality. They challenge the patriarchal culture by their free and frank sexual behaviour. Therefore, such images of rebellious women are not found in the works of earlier Indian English novelists. Contrary in their works we find the images of tradition – bound women whereas the images of sexually liberated, free-thinking, upper-class modern women dominate the fictional world of Shobhaa De. Shobhaa De projects men’s pride, incompatible marriages, traditional norms of behaviour and patriarchal social system as the real forces of the oppression of women in her fictional world. She concentrates on developing women characters that are comparatively much freer from moral and social restrictions than the ordinary, submissive and docile women. These characters do not represent the common lot of women but their behaviour indicates the emerging trends in contemporary Indian metropolitans. *Today, the women have shed their inhibitions and are far more successful than men in every sphere of life.* (62) So, is it fine according to her if women compromise on their dignity in order to climb up the corporate ladder? *No way! The casting couch exists everywhere, but a woman should never have the word ‘compromise’ in the dictionary of her life,* says Shobhaa. *In fact, a woman, or an individual, whosoever it may be, should not compromise in life,* adds Shobhaa.
The Image of Liberated and Emancipated New Woman:

Through this a modest attempt has been made to depict the image of liberated and emancipated women in Shobhaa De’s novels. She also throws a significant light on how the subjugated and marginalized women, through their rebellion, achieve liberation and emancipation. In fact, the fictional world of Shobhaa De is dominated by the women characters whereas the male characters are pushed into the margin. It is the woman in Shobhaa De’s works who holds all the trump cards. She is a manipulator whose clever strategy looks beyond the male comprehension. In this respect Shobhaa De’s woman is New Indian Woman. In 1960s, with the rise of feminism, there emerged the New Woman, who is completely different from her traditional counterpart. This New Woman is conscious, confident and sometimes even aggressive. She occupies the centre and has got rid of her position of the “other”. She is now aware of her destination, that is, to liberate herself from the clutches of unjust taboos and customs imposed on her by the male-dominated society. The modern women depicted by Shobhaa De do not depend, for their survival, on their fathers, husbands or sons. They are financially independent and have the required strength to face life with all its ups and downs. They are assertive, practical and strong. They fall into the category of new woman who solves her problems herself. As a writer of the woman-centered fiction De has worked for the complete emancipation of woman. She projects the ideas of liberating woman through self-realization. As a self-realized person, Karuna in Socialite Evenings opts for singlehood as a way of life. She refuses the offer of Girish and Ranbir and gets ready to live her life on her own terms by rejecting the idea of getting married second time. She is emancipated against the orthodox role of women and dominates her male counterparts. Karuna is the modern New Woman, who is independent in every way. She breaks out of the bonds of marriage and lands her feet firm into the profession of her choice that is modelling. Anjali and Ritu are also presented as liberated and emancipated New Women. In the fields such as familial, social, sexual and business, De’s women revolt against the traditional image of Indian woman. They are sexually liberated and free thinking women. Similarly, Aasha Rani of Starry Nights is a liberated woman who lives for her own pleasures and knows no moral codes and value system. Her lesbian experience with friend Linda
implies independence from man. Shobhaa De also reinforces her plea for liberation through the example of Sudha, Aasha Rani’s sister. Sudha lives with Amar without marriage. Here cohabitation and not marriage seems to be the watchword for her. In the Indian tradition marriage is glorified as a holy union of man and woman. It is the turning point and the beginning of a new way of life. However, in Shobhaa De’s novels all these ideas regarding marriage are shattered by her modern liberated women. With marriage the other important issue that De’s novels deal with is sex. Sex to her women is no longer a dreaded and despised thing. Her women enjoy a great deal of sexual freedom. In *Sisters*, through Mikki and Alisha, Shobhaa De shows how the concept of marriage and constancy in love has undergone a tremendous change. Mikki’s encounters with different men help her to develop into an independent woman who at the cost of her individuality finally saves the Hiralal Industries. Shobhaa De’s women who are unmarried also appear to be expressing their need for sexual liberation. Alisha expresses the novelist’s desire of liberation for women in sexual matters. Next, a middle-class working woman Taarini asserts her love for Shashi, despite her husband and children. Shobhaa De’s women break all sorts of taboos and feel liberated. In *Strange Obsession*, an effort to free themselves completely from dependence on men, women like Meenakshi Iyengar indulge in lesbianism. Here, through the portrayal of Minx, De deconstructs the traditional concepts of love and sex. Shobhaa De’s *Sultry Days* presents a group of modern women and throws a significant light on the change in the perspective of women. The women such as D’Lima, Lotika, Vimala, Manju, Chandni, Shona, Tanya, Zainab etc. break the established patriarchal norms by their deviant behaviour. Their action and assertions reveal that they are highly liberated young modern women. The world of *Snapshots*, is a world entirely dominated by women. It is a world full of adventures of powerful, emancipated new women. The six women presented in the novel are empowered by their sexuality. They are urban, self-sufficient, economically independent and confident women who transform themselves from ‘commodities’ to ‘identities’. Marriage can no longer hold them down. Such women are Aparna, Rashmi and Reema. The novel *Second Thoughts* depicts Maya who is caught in a dilemma between her husband’s conservatism and her desire for liberation. Finally, Shobhaa De also breaks the
shackles of linguistic discipline by boldly employing highly objectionable language, thereby liberating the language from the male hegemony.

Thus, being a woman, De is more interested in the predicaments of women. She presents the vital reality and makes us aware of the miseries of women and injustices done to them by their counterparts in the patriarchal society. However, it is an important fact that though De’s novels are crowded with female characters, the analysis of the novels reveals her focus is only on the women protagonists, and the other secondary characters are simply mentioned. Furthermore, her novels move around only the metropolitan women whereas rural women do not find place in her novels. They are totally ignored. Shobhaa De restricts her characters to the urban area, ignoring the life of ordinary, illiterate and rural Indian women. As a staunch supporter and an ardent follower of feminism there is a bold and frank depiction of fair sex and feminine attitude in her works. Her novels are the protest novels against the male-dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom of expression and action. Everywhere they are curbed by many man-made norms and factors victimizing and subjugating them in several ways. As a result of their oppression, exploitation and marginalization, they turn rebellious. Next, through the depiction of warring pairs of women Shobhaa De brings out the psychological truth that woman is the enemy of the woman.

Shobhaa De’s novels represent the new Indian woman’s voice. A ‘New woman’ is in search of self-identity, seeking liberation in all walks of life, replacing the traditional image of Indian woman. The need for women to seek their identity is the message in her novels. However, De also exposes the women’s misunderstanding regarding their freedom and mocks at their way of asserting their individuality by posing to be men without concentrating on female empowerment as a whole. Her women protagonists fail to understand that their sexual freedom is being used and abused by men. The novelist also suggests that, whenever women, whether circumstantially or ambitiously disregard morality; they cannot escape disaster and consequent suffering. Though De has presented women who indulge in free sex, live fashionable and wealthy life; she in no way seems to support the way of life adopted by these so called modern women. On the contrary, she shows her contempt and dislike for their unethical and socially unacceptable
behaviour. This can be deduced from the ultimate fate her heroines are condemned to as a result of their indulgence in unusual activities and deviant behaviour. In fact, Shobhaa De advises her women to analyze their behaviour and stop posing to be men. Finally, though her novels are criticized for pornographic element, De is definitely a writer with a purpose. One cannot ignore her because she is the celebrity writer and has contributed in her own distinct way to Indian Novel in English. In the present scenario of gender discrimination, a study of these novels helps to widen and direct our thoughts to relevant problems affecting women in Indian society.

De’s fiction: An Identity of women in men’s world:

In 1928 Virginia Woolf delivered a modest lecture called A Room of One’s Own. Nobody could have foreseen at that time that one day it would give rise to a new thinking on issues pertaining to the status of women. Virginia Woolf said that they are too simple and that so much has been left out, unattempted.

Simone De’s The Second Sex nurtured the feminist ideology; it was in the seventies and eighties of the present century that various issues touching women were considered systematically. A positive sense of feminine identity has found recognition now and women are stepping out of the rigid sex role assigned to them traditionally. They are busy in western world and the urban patches in India with ‘self actualizing’, whose identities are not dependent on man. Conscious of the evils originating from patriarchy, they would not endorse the wisdom of Tennysonian separation of roles and spheres of activity: man for the field and woman for the hearth / man for the sword and for the needle she (The Princess, V 427). Indian women novelists have concentrated on women’s problems in their works and have given vent to a protest against male domination. The Indian society is basically patriarchal where a woman is given the secondary role. Even in Anushashan Parva in Mahabharat it is being said All her glorification, all her fulfillment lies in sacrificing her life and happiness for the sake of man in different forms of father, husband and the son. The modern woman does not find any sense in such self-sacrifice and yearns for self-expression, individuality and self-identity. She is trying to free herself of the dependence syndrome as says Chaman Nahal— I define Feminism as a mode of
existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome, where it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group when women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes. (Nahal, 30) Simone de Beauvoir expresses his own views on man - woman nexus --- man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity. (Seldom, 534) A woman is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a subordinate and relative position. Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees ----. She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex.... absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. (Seldom, 534)

Shobhaa De is emerging as a feminist writer today and her writings are gaining popularity for their inclination towards this fair sex and the graphic depiction of their pursuits and attitudes. These raise a protest against the male dominated Indian society where the women are denied the freedom to act according to their will and continue to cherish their own dreams in futility. Women are treated as a subaltern and mere man’s shadow-self. They are considered the otherness of man and not one with men or individuals. However the role of women in society has been changing with each decade of a century, always with a good deal of social conflict and ideological struggle. These have left a great influence on sexual mores and social codes of the prevalent society which in turn is well embodied by Shobhaa De in her characters.

She voices against the malist culture and strongly detects the marginalization of women. She does not believe in describing her women characters as love slaves or mere helpmates at home. In her novels she mirrors her own feminist and sexist mind set. A broader evaluation of her works reveals her protest against the image of women as an appendage or an auxiliary. Shobhaa De strives to undo this tilted and distorted image of woman who cries for freedom and equality which still goes unheard in patriarchal
society. On Women’s Day her feminist attitude appeared in *TIMES LIFE* on 8th March, when she declared:

“There are days when I say to myself, “Wow!! Being a woman is the best thing that has happened to me.” Such days used to be frequent. Say, in a calendar year, these words would have echoed my sentiments at least 200 out of the 365 days. Not anymore. They average 100 at best. And even then, I catch myself asking, “Just who am I kidding?” Sad. If I can say or feel or think such a thought, imagine how utterly awful life must be for the vast majority of women in our country. Those anonymous, nameless, faceless, futureless females who wake up each day of their wretched lives cursing the Gods that brought them into this world as women. Isn’t it shameful that this is so? I look around me at so-called elite, educated, empowered ladies and wonder just how ‘empowered’ they really are behind the sham of being power ladies and women who ‘have it all’. The sad truth is women are the world’s most marginalized minority. And unlike other minorities, there is nobody to represent this target group - where it counts and when it counts. We continue to get beaten, raped, sold, murdered, traded, burnt, stoned, maimed, humiliated and exploited on each and every level, each and every day. Our crime? Gender. Which is why I can’t write a jaunty, cheerful piece about how wonderful it feels to be a woman and how we should all be celebrating this great day, reserved especially for us. I’d be lying – once again – to myself, if I did that. Perhaps I’ve picked the wrong day to pen this. Perhaps I should have waited for the present mood to pass. That is what I’ve taught myself to do. That is what most women do. They wait. We have been waiting since the beginning of time. And where has it got us? What has changed? Please don’t flaunt the usual suspects and say, *Oh.... but look at Hillary Clinton, Sonia Gandhi, Oprah Winfrey.... such accomplished, successful ladies, who have achieved so much – much more than most men.*” Sure, go ahead and look at them. Do you see yourself? No? Surprised that you don’t? Or worse, resigned? That’s just the point. For every Hillary\Sonia\Oprah, there are millions – yes, millions – of women who live and die in grief. Daily grief which falls on them like steady rain that never lets the sun shine through those brooding dark clouds. Besides, who can look into the hearts and souls of our female icons to find out just how happy they are? We love to hang on to the many myths surrounding highly successful ladies – that they have mastered the life-balance ratio, that they are the way they are
because they’ve challenged the status quo, rewritten rules, broken barriers, shattered glass ceilings. If so, good for them. But how does that help the rest of us? The ones who continue to struggle each and every day just to stay alive… breathe… eat… without getting crushed… verbally, emotionally, physically, and financially. (67)

From this perspective the women in her works are more powerful than men. Women are essentially represented sexually liberated and free thinking and have become known as the New women in later twentieth century fiction. But even more remarkable is the strength of her characters in the very culture that has judged her. Her female characters especially only after they have gone through their own experiences, come to their real self. De’s women may or may not be flappers yet they are much more in physical strength and athletic than their mothers have been. In 1927 an article was published by Harper’s Magazine entitled “Feminist –New Style which declared the newly evolved modern Be a composite figure, a boyish girl who combines the flapper’s physical freedom, sexuality and stamina with feminist self assertiveness and traditional domestic femininity, a woman who can happily combine, pleasure, career and marriage. To the advanced young men of the time, this new woman seems the perfect companion-fearless, bright and eager to participant to work, in play, in marital sex. (Dorothy, 148)

We know this image might be admired and easily accepted by the Indian males. Shobhaa De however shapes her women. In her works like Socialite Evening, Sisters, and Sultry Days, Shobhaa De attempts to portray the above discussed feminine characteristic. Her female protagonists are just remarkable when measured against men. Men women relation is almost hollow and compromising. The men women’s complimentary image has been completely shattered. In her novels she has tried to highlight the discord in marital relationship. It is usually painful and destructive to be together. Undoubtedly, the female characters need the companionship of a man in order to satisfy their natural urge. Shobhaa De’s women are daring and establish extra marital affairs in order to get rid of their marital ennui. These women are not hesitant in using sex as calculated strategy to gain social and financial benefits; marriage for them is merely an insurance against social aloofness. Karuna, the main character and narrator of Shobhaa De's Socialite Evenings is not concerned with the lot of women, her concern changes to ‘I am the good thing’ and
even this 'I' does not stand for any commitment to spiritual and moral values but it is 'a good thing' because it can be dressed up and presented as an extremely marketable product over the media. Throughout her novel Socialite Evenings, the protagonist Karuna is a woman who declines to dog the traditional path of etiquette and manners. Her marriage is a failure since it is without love, joy and mutual faith. Her husband is just an average Indian husband as he is “unexpected, uninspiring, untutored. He was not made for introspection. (De,SE- 65) We find Karuna saying, *Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to.* (68) Though she becomes a well trained wife but there seems to be no meaningful communication between the couple. Karuna voices her protest about her futile and meaningless marital relationship: *I think our marriage was over the day our honeymoon started. We have got nothing going. I don’t love you --never have. As for you --I really don’t know this day why you choose to marry me. I don’t think you even know who you married.* (69)

There is a complete emotional void: only silence, compromise and adjustment seem to prevail between the two. This marital boredom leads her to establish an affair with Girish, which she considers beyond sin. She is happy to express without hesitation her sexual urge for men other than her husband. She makes an ingenious declaration about her inner thirst in the following words: *I love this friend of yours, and I will feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. May be he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant me, in which case it will really be A Death in Venice.* It appears that Karuna has just a formal relationship with her husband. Intimacy between the two seems missing together. Similarly De’s women who are unmarried also appear expressing their need for sexual liberation. In the novel *Sisters*, Alisha first goes to Naveen for sexual gratification and later it continues to sway her to Dr. Kurien. In an arousing scene while Dr. Kurien was making love to her, he happens to say: *All the rich women are same-you want more all the time-Nothing satisfies you. Here take it all.............. It’s free.* (70) It is not only Alisha but her sister Mikki too accepts the demands of flesh. She successfully flirts with Shanay. Susheela the protagonist of her maiden story “Susheela’s Secret” also confesses her hidden desire to have sex with men other than her husband. She says: *I would think now it could be with someone else-may be an actor, a film star, Amitabh Bachchan or*
Jackie Shroff, even Nana Patekar. I’d started to imagine Mr. Deshpande by my side.

Here she attempts to break loose from the traditional sexual conventions. Finally she has it with her boss. Karuna in *Socialite Evenings*, Mikki and Alisha in *Sisters*, Susheela in *Susheela’s Secrets*, appear to be rebellious modern Indian women who challenge the orthodoxy of sexual and social taboos. They are certainly different from the sexually ignorant Indian women as described by Khushwant Singh and other writers. Khushwant Singh represents an old age view about Indian women: *this is all most Indian women know of sex- an unpleasant subjection to men’s desire-necessary in order to have sons, bearable because of its brevity.* But De antagonizes this view very forcefully in her works. Her female protagonists challenge the traditional set up of the society. In the course of breaking social traditions and conventions, they establish sexual relations without any feeling of guilt.

Shobhaa De’s women are far more assertive, domineering and bold in comparison to their male counterparts. They are not submissive. They are not guilty about their affairs and attitudes. In *Sultry Days* the female character Sujata once or twice a year invites everyone to her spacious flat to listen to visiting poets from far flung places. *Sujata would play Mother hen and gather all her chicks to her bosom---literally.*

She feels her duties are over as her children are self-dependent. Regarding her affairs, she boldly claims: *yes …they accept ’why shouldn’t they? I’ve been a good wife and a good mother. I am still here, living in the same house. They are grateful. I could easily have left and gone away. So many men longed to make me theirs. I receive marriage proposal all the time…..even now.* Sujata is quite gross and repulsive in her mid forties. She writes poems and she is comfortable with whatever she does. She goes by her mind. She does not live a life which is defined by her husband. She follows her natural instincts and makes her own rules. She hardly cares for the institution called Society. Similarly in *Sisters*, Mikki after her father’s death takes over his business. Ramankaka , one of her father’s friends and a confidant of her father’s business’s complexities, suggests to her
that he be consulted in all her decisions about business transactions. But it is Mikki who holds the key to decisions and gets an obvious victory as she declares:

*Thank you for your advice, Ramankaka, I appreciate and value your words. But I’d like you to hear few of mine now. I can’t change my sex, unfortunately ……but can change just about everything else…..and I Intend to ….this is going to be my show and I intend running it on my terms.* (430) Mikki is not emotional, subdued and weak, like traditional Indian woman.

On the contrary she is assertive, pragmatic and strong. Here Mikki challenges the usual orthodox vision of a society. She is a tough woman who easily and without any sense of guilt breaks off her engagement with Naveen, when he fails to respond to her wish. When the actress Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights*, finally decides to quit films and live with Akshay, her Amma tries to dissuade her from doing so. Aasha Rani boldly pronounces: *Money, money, money. That’s all you think of. Well I’m fed up of being your money machine. I have done enough for everybody-you, Sudha and others-now I want to live for myself and enjoy life* (308) She finally decides not to be a plaything at the hands of her Amma and others. In fact it is Akshay who is hesitant about the whole affair. He tells her that he cannot consult his solicitor as he might disclose the whole affair to Malini, his wife. But she triumphantly reacts: *I’ll handle everything. I’ll talk to someone. We will find a solution. You wait and see* (309). This exhibits her confidence and optimistic outlook. Further she suggests that they should convert to Muslims. At this Akshay gets infuriated and expresses his unwillingness. She finally blasts at him: *I thought it could work because I wanted it to. But you couldn’t care it less. You have just taken me up again because your career is in doldrums and you are scared shitless of your wife.* (310)

Aasha Rani seems to be more powerful and bold than Akshay. She, like other heroines of Shobhaa De, designs a code of conduct for herself which is free of the prescribed gender roles and sexual restraints of traditional society. *(73)*

Thus, Shobhaa De’s women are more mature than their mates. Yet in their own world her men have an implied code of stoic manliness by which to define themselves in their relationships to women that do not assure success. Men seem very passive in response to
women; they are indifferent or insensitive, unwilling or unable to take action or to accept responsibility for the way things turn out. Though in the Indian male dominated society women are marginalized by their husbands but Shobhaa De’s women are different. They have the ability to detest the indifferent and callous attitude of the husbands who often keep themselves busy in drab monotonous activities like reading business papers and playing chess. Karuna in Socialite Evenings can realize how Indian women have been assigned a subordinate and relative position as she says: we were reduced to being marginal people. Everything that mattered to us was trivialized. The message was our priorities. It was taken for granted that our needs were secondary to theirs. (69)

Karuna is able to recognize how Indian women are made to listen and tolerate and are denied to live as autonomous beings. Though her husband is not cruel but certainly he tries to impose his superiority which we can sense from Karuna’s statement: He brainwashes me constantly. I am made to feel obliged and in debt. It’s awful but even my insistence on working and contributing to running the expenses of the house has become a battleground. (69) This certifies that men in Shobhaa De’s works are traditional and stereotyped; they are not the ideal husbands as they are incomplete and inadequate. So they are not able to dominate their wives. De has presented men resorting to several defence mechanisms against their self confident wives but most of the time they do not succeed. They are terribly threatened by their females. In Strange Obsessions Meenakshi, the lesbian sex monger, chases Amrita and causes her deep anxiety. After the fire incident when Amrita enquires from Mr. Iyenger whether Minx’s moves and attitudes did not bother him as father, he answers thoughtfully: I was always scared of her …….scared of her rage, unsure of what she might do if I reacted…….but my men, the few I trust kept an eye on her most of the time. But Meenakshi outwitted them also. (8) Here we observe Minx’s father terming her as an extremely clever and manipulative girl. He is terribly threatened by her ways so he seems unable to control her actions. In Socialite Evenings, we find Karuna’s husband accepting Winnie’s power and fear from her in the following words: She is a very strange and powerful woman. I feel ashamed to admit this but I am scared of her. I can’t do anything because I know she will destroy me. She has that power. (264)
To sum up we can say that Shobhaa De writes from a definite feminine perspective. Her female characters are endowed with a vision which penetrates human psyche. They easily outplay their male counterparts with a better control and placidity.

In their attitude, desires and expressions mostly the males are subdued and threatened by the self assured and self reliant females. Her women revolt against the traditional image of Indian women in words and deeds, be it business or sexual spheres. In a sense she is the forerunner of the emerging Indian women with her liberated womanhood. Shobhaa De’s women refuse to align themselves with the prevailing partial male ideology. They essentially are the assertive women like Amrita and Minx, often take up revolutionary roles and want to destroy the existing malist social structure.

Given an open defiance of women, the men in De’s works are usually submissive and timid. Their positions are marginalized and it is hardly any male who dominates the proceedings for a long time. The author herself deprives the male from playing a significant part in her novels.

Consequently, the men whose authority has been defied and deflated by the women in her novels, De has carved and shaped a world for women. Casting aside their submissiveness, they run to the extremes of being violently radical, defiantly uncompromising, overly promiscuous and open malicious. They revel in an uninhibited universe where the male is pushed into a corner and forced to live a secluded and subdued existence.

Shobhaa De's novels indicate the arrival of a New Indian woman. Her women protagonists defy rebelliously against the orthodoxy of patriarchy. They show the novelist's intimate understanding of the psyche of woman and her problems. (74)

**The Corrupt Urban Culture in Shobhaa De’s Sisters**

Shobhaa De’s *Sisters*, is a story of corrupt urban culture where human relationship has lost its all values. At the same time, it is a tale about emotional bond between two sisters, Mallika and Alisha. They are the daughters, one legitimate and the other illegitimate, of big time business man Hiralal who dies at the beginning. The story revolves around the
corrupt urban world of business in Bombay. It is full of sex, betrayal, hatred, intrigue and corruption. Shobhaa De successfully depicts evils of corrupt urban culture and salvation of main characters form these evils. Ultimately, it is not a salvation or an escape, but an acceptance of reality.

Shobhaa De is renowned for bold and frank style of writing. She explored the lives of bored housewives and their loveless rich husband and family. Her novels mirror the life styles of the elite and the middle classes of urban world. Her style of discussing woman’s issue in her novel is quite challenging and untraditional. She does not hesitate to deal with sex. According to B.J.Geetha, Shobhaa De’s *Sisters* is miniature of the messy life and moral chaos of the urban culture. *Sisters* deals with the psychic conflict of woman protagonist who is caught between a personal self and a societal self. *Sisters* is a story of the life of young men and women of the urban world where love and virtues are dead. K.K. Sinha rightly states, *Shobhaa De stands for equal and normal treatment to the woman in this hurly-burly world of ours….She stand for the New Woman – casual looking but ambitious, professional focused and in control.*

According to Shobhaa De, *All people need sex. It is something special, something beautiful, something shared.* To a question by a woman, *sex…who needs?* Shobhaa De answers, *Everybody, darling everybody.* [Sing. K. p.208] Shobhaa De does not ignore the subject of sex. The sex is considered “a taboo subject”. De confesses, *It is important for women to talk about it. Our mother endured it silently because it was a taboo subject. Nobody was interested in women’s view on sex…It is a kind of catharsis.* [Survival Tactics] Sex for Shobhaa De’s female characters is a life’s reality. They accept it as an inseparable part of life. They think and discuss about it openly. Both female characters of *Sisters* consider sex as reality of their lives. Mikki and Alisha cross the boundary of a typical traditional Indian Woman. Shobhaa De depicts the urban world where man and woman do not become one in marriage; they merely act as partners in love. Freedom of urban culture, uncontrolled passion for sex and lust destroys the beautiful lives of men and women and finally they get frustration of life. The high flying modern urban culture is destroying Indian culture and tradition. Money has taken place of human affection. Materialistic success of urban world has wiped out all human values. Shobhaa De’s
Sisters, is a mirror of vulture like urban culture, where all human relationships have lost its values.\(^{(75)}\)

**Matriarchal Assertiveness in Shobhaa De’s Select Novels:**

The institution of marriage has been a fearful strain in recent times. To the Indian psyche marriage had always been a blessed union of a couple. And in order to achieve this harmonious relationship it was but essential that both men and women go beyond a mere physical relationship. The traditional marriage found this union a stage in individual life heralding a new status. Marriage is not ruled out in the lives of modern and liberated women. Simon De Beauvoir upholds marriage as essential and beneficial. In Shobhaa De’s book, *The Second Sex*, she observes: Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered by society. History proves that marriage is essential to the well being of human society and that celibacy brings ruin upon states.\(^{(76)}\) *Socialite Evenings* (1989) Shobhaa De’s maiden novel centers around the story of Karuna, a prominent Bombay socialite, seeking escape from the nightmares of broken marriage, failed relationships and a mentally disturbed sister. Set against the backdrop of the Bombay film world *Starry Nights* (1991), is another woman-oriented novel where the protagonist Aasha Rani struggles for survival in a ruthless world of Hindi films. Sexually exploited she becomes desperate and decides to revenge on the male society. *Sisters* (1992) De’s next novel unfolds the life story of two sisters- Mikki, the legitimate daughter of Seth Hiralal and Alisha, the illegitimate daughter of Leelabhan. Both the girls are good looking and wealthy. Initially they are portrayed absolutely hostile to each other but later tend to become the best of friends trying to set their life in order. *Strange Obsessions* (1992), is a novel about an obsession and its calamitous consequences set in the Mega city. Bombay’s glitzy world of fashion revolves around the central character Amrita. In Shobhaa De’s fictional world a victimized woman is often presented as facing life confidently. *Sultry Days* (1994), concludes on the note of how a woman with a fully integrated personality can solve all her problems in life and need not be a victim, a fact manifested through the powerfully drawn character of Nisha Verma. When she is left with love failures she begins a new life with hope. *Snap Shots* (1995), centers around the reunion of a group of school friends several years later in life, most of whom are married career women. The get-together of
the friends is arranged on the insistence of Swati, returning from London for a brief holiday in India. The friends explore the hidden secrets they had buried deep in the past. Almost all the male characters presented here are viewed as tyrants, who in different circumstances have variously victimized women. Shobhaa De’s latest novel _Second Thoughts_ (1996) is a candid study of a woman’s imbroglio in the contemporary Indian metropolitan society, while she struggles to maintain equilibrium between tradition and modernity. Maya, the central character marries Ranjan, who is constantly engrossed and lost in his business world. Maya, given to boredom therefore begins an extramarital affair with Nikhil, a young college boy. _Second Thoughts_, portrays this vicious existential circle related to the so-called modern Indian woman who is caught inextricably in the marital set up. Unlike the protagonists of other women writers like Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan, Karuna the main character of Shobhaa De’s _Socialite Evenings_, hails from a middle class family. Initially, she works as a model, then resorts to writing and later turns to making advertisement of films. She meets all sorts of people during her career and thus becomes insightful about human relationships. She craves to be included under the ‘charmed circle of rich girls who had everything and associated with aristocratic family.’ Karuna’s initiation into a fashionable world of modern life begins at Anjali’s fancy palace at Malabar Hill. But Karuna has been trapped into a meaningless marriage as it was said she had married a wrong man for the wrong reason at the wrong time (_Socialite Evenings_ 15). Karuna becomes repulsive to her husband’s compulsive socializing, his horrible safari suits and the gum he constantly chewed. She tried to divert herself with her books besides losing herself in fantasies, crosswords, newspapers and chess. Karuna’s marriage lacked the vitality, which she had expected. Very soon she found that her world was quiet different from that of her husband’s. As a result Karuna fails to get the required emotional support from her husband and decides to separate from him. She realizes herself as one locked up in a fragile marital knot, and leading a life of emotional frigidity. All meaningful communication between the partners was slowly coming to a standstill. There is not a smile, laughter, free exchange of thought and ideas, or queries but only silence. All attempts to break this ennui were in vain: Karuna’s marriage fails, as it was loveless. Her husband to her was an average Indian male. The realization that Karuna ultimately comes to is that, there is neither romance nor glory in marriage. Instead only a
demystification of it ‘Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to’ (Socialite Evenings 68). Unlike other married women who have practically no choice left but what their husbands will and desire, Karuna fosters independent thoughts. She has her own say and she is ready to choose her own ways. Consequently, Karuna discards the traditional morality expected of a dutiful wife and relishes in an extra marital relationship with Krish. When she gets the divorce from her husband she moves from place to place seeking a job. She discovers she is pregnant and she fears. She wants to abort her child: She seeks an escape as she leaves her husband’s house and starts living with Anjali, her friend, who hails from a Jain family. On second thoughts she decides to have the baby. Her friend Anjali then discards her views most vehemently as she chides her. One day she decides to separate from him, and quits. In the beginning she lives as a paying guest but later goes back to her parent’s home. Karuna experiences the valuable support extended to her by the family in her moments of crisis. She had been running away from reality all this, while making her existence superficial. How much she had craved for independence, and was defiant of all authority. But now she reckons the support of a family meant to her. Karuna’s mother however is anxious about her future. How long she can live as a single separated woman? She urges her to reconsider her marriage, once again stressing that a woman cannot live alone and she needs a man’s protection and that society is cruel to single woman: Society can be very cruel- a woman’s real place is in her husband’s house-not in her parents’- Take your time but marry. And marry the right one-that is important. Before we die, we want to see you secure and at peace. (77) Her mother counsels how a woman’s real place is in her husband’s home not in her parent’s, and urges Karuna to think, take her time to choose someone and marry. Karuna wonders why security should rest with a male. She is convinced that without a husband she is perfectly at peace with herself. She does not want to complicate her life by getting married again. Marriage implied untold sacrifices. Karuna recalled her mother’s words that marriage is merely a question of getting used to change. Consequently, the transformation in her character is obvious when she moves from frivolity to responsibility. When her husband comes to fetch her she refuses to go back with him realizing that a life of responsibilities was certainly worth living, rather than the unhappy, vacuum of matrimony. Whilst her mother continued to worry about her
single status Karuna was complacent. She was feeling self-assured and self-sufficient without a husband to boss around. The character of Karuna finds a resonance in Shobhaa De’s *Second Thoughts*, which revolves around the central character of Maya. An arranged marriage between Ranjan Malick, an American trained business executive from Bombay and Maya, an educated, freedom-loving girl from Calcutta is doomed to fail due to their radically different outlook on life. Despite his western upbringing Ranjan expects his spouse to be compromising and traditionally plain women. Maya on the contrary fails to comprehend why his outlook is not modern and craves to lead a life that becomes fitting in Bombay. She persistently endeavors for equality, but her efforts only arouse suspicion in Ranjan. This strains their relationship... *Tonight I wanted to behave like a cheap woman . . . I was not getting any sleep . . . he old ache between the legs was bothering me. I reached out Ranjan, put my arm across his shoulders (but) I could feel his body stiffening, resisting.*

Maya in *Second Thoughts* cherished great love for nature. In the winter season, she rushed to the balcony and took a few rapid breaths, enjoying the atmosphere and how ‘the air smelled different, and how there was a thin grey veil draped over the city’ (*Second Thoughts* 138). Very much contrary to Maya’s absorption with the natural beauty around, Ranjan who lacks imagination and he replies that it is pollution not mist’ (*Second Thoughts* 139). Again, when Maya expresses her love for music, the spell of which made her feel ‘falling inexorably in love with this Bombay’ (*Second Thoughts* 12). Ranjan regards music only as a ‘jarring sound’ and ridicules how these people spend their momentous times ‘watching such nonsense’ (*Second Thoughts* 30). Maya’s silent cry for true companionship remains unheard by Ranjan. Even, she was not permitted to take up a part time job for a diversion. Being frustrated, she seeks solace in conversing with a vegetable vendor, and later develops a passionate friendship with a college going young neighbor Nikhil. The friendship between them progresses into a physical intimacy. It was a moment of awareness that Maya, experiences a deep sense of guilt. She feels disturbed and regrets that she had not given serious thought about her married life. Her plunging into an extramarital affair sorrowfully makes her ruminate that she should have tried to save her marriage instead of encouraging Nikhil. She earnestly regrets and despairs that she should have instead made adjustments and compromises to sustain her marriage since, “marriages needed a great
deal of effort to run smoothly and be sustained.” The ending of the novel is abrupt, no doubt, but Shobhaa De has successfully depicted the conflict arising out of the failure of the Indian women in precisely solving the clash between conservatism and liberalization. The gender issue of male dominance, the non-acceptance of a liberated woman by the Indian society, the growing question of sexual, familial and individual values and ethics has been dexterously interrogated by Shobhaa De in Second Thoughts. A fact that has been long accepted is that the psychic life of women plays a crucial role in their subordination or liberation. Women writers are involved in redefining the personal and the domestic roles of women all over the world with the basic thrust on the breaking of the taboos and recasting of identities in the mould of their own expectations. Shobhaa De’s ideas are consistent with such women writers who have concluded that women in general are much disturbed by many aspects of the sexuality distinctions and varied responsibilities of gender. Both the writers are preoccupied with sexuality because they feel that is an area which women have been repressed and perhaps to rediscover their individuality as human beings. Thus women should lay emphasis on proper education and so that she can step forward to a meaningful reaction and revolt against the parochial social system. Lastly the women characters of Shobhaa De when subjected to strains and stresses both internal and external, evolve a set of responses to protect their psyche from being bruised, thus giving credence to the fact that every women need evolving her own defense mechanism in this world of male dominance. Since most of them are economically independent and socially emancipated they deserve the epithet for in every walk of life right from earning a living to most blatant issues of sexuality, they are on a level of parity with their male counterparts. The rebellious note of the dominant female characters of Shobhaa De clearly vindicates matriarchal assertiveness to establish themselves as individuals.

Superstar India: From Incredible to Unstoppable, Shobhaa De’s study of India:

Shobhaa De, the much controversial novelist gives readers an opportunity to see both the dark and glittering aspects of ‘Superstar India’. When she writes, the pseudo-appearances of some so-called ideologists, white collars and humanists are crushed under her fully
observant and realistic vision which is commonly ignored by civilized people. She has already got much criticism for such kind of her writings but glory cannot be made perfect until all the negatives are not expelled. So, Shobhaa De, while sailing in the ocean of glorious India observes some snags in technically organized social, political, moral, spiritual and national set up and gazes them satirically that make her journey hard.

This book is a contemporary take on India. Unlike similar books written by male historians, politicians and economists. This is a book from a woman's perspective.

It is a cultural mapping of India and the changes in the country written by a woman who is exactly the same age as the country and has lived the change.

The book voices my belief that India is on the verge of becoming one of the most important superpowers ever and we should know how to leverage it and make the most of this moment.

India has been the shining example of satisfaction and unity, still great progress is being made in many aspects of national life: health, education, industry, agriculture, tourism, politics, economic and other fields. India’s vibrant democracy is still a wonder to the world, despite its huge population with the associated problems of illiteracy and poverty. Here, individual society, family and nation are enduring to face the challenges of the present. Acharya Mahapragya and A. P. J. Abdul Kalam focus on the essential facts to make India prosperous.

But Shobhaa feels the poverty in India as quite paradoxical because people in India have gone so comfortable in dealing with poverty that they don’t consider it is a blemish on India’s age old heritage and honour. *Britishers departed from India after making India empty of many assets and India became bankrupt, hopeless in debt and unable to feed the hungry people and Mahatma Gandhi interestingly handed over the rest of the money to Pakistan during partition ‘like returning the mehr after traumatic talaq.*

Corruption is also institutionalized in India. Palms are being greased even from the high levels. Common official are only the insignificant pawns of the game. Pleasing others in such ways (*chamchagiri*) is known as *lagao maska* and *chai paani* in civilized language.
In India, initiatives are not taken unless one’s palm is greased. She recollects the humiliation her father had to undergo for many years to get his monthly pension. For thirty of our sixty years as a country, we suffered from a sense of inferiority. Nothing we did or produced was deemed well enough. We started to think our standards were far too low to impress outsiders. Besides, the awful Third World tag was nearly impossible to shake off. Third World, instantly demoted us, made us feel inadequate and small. This was followed by a less direct but equally offensive Developing Nation label. Perhaps, we over-reacted to both. Maybe they were accurate and apt descriptions that we had to accept, however unpalatable they were. (79) In spite of all these hurdles, India has such unavoidable charms that make the man ‘easy to fall in love with’. It is also demanding, captivating, alluring, enchanting and remarkable. Shobhaa has observed both sides of the coin. Ultimately, she finds that people in the country have changed to a great extent. They have begun believing in themselves, ‘renegotiating the past equation with the world’ and living in a more happy position. In this context, India has become an enigma to the world. Shobhaa moves her sail to the transformed Indian and finds: India is such a maddening enigma. The more you think you know it, the more it frustrates you. It changes rapidly, constantly, taking new avatars as it deftly recolours itself, chameleon-like to match shifting attitude, global tills … But we love our many faces, for without them, we wouldn’t have survived. I love that about us- our amazing ability to adapt to any kind of change. (430) India has passed several crucial crossroads and has entered ‘into a future that is seductive and tantalizing and it has reached such a state because of the backbone (family) of Indian social system that has invaded the complex Indian society. Shobhaa discards all the isms adapted by Indian spiritualism as the saving grace of maintaining India as ‘incredible and unstoppable’. She thanks to the Lord that in such a topsy-turvy atmosphere, spiritualism is still intact. India tackles all disturbances like ‘divisiveness, religious bigotry, terrorist threats, and disintegration of family and galloping economic ambitions’ with perfect tolerance. Shobhaa De considers Karma, another reviving factor of India’s indomitable will. And as long as Indians keep their karmic faith and irrepressible ability to hope, dream and achieve, chances are the next century will indisputably belong to India. And the old-fashioned, irrational traditionalist that I am,
doesn’t mind confessing I’m touching wood and praying to Ganesha to make that a reality-preferably during my life time! (441-442)

Shobhaa minutely observes all the small and insignificant events of life but such events like children’s hurling stones at puppies and the negligence of parents to this common event shows the mental bent of the people of India. She also colors the white collars into the hue of reality which is hard to digest for middle or high class people of India. In other words, each event marked by Shobhaa De gives people a peep into their own lives and strike the black part in them. So, critics’ finding faults in Shobhaa’s work, by sometimes calling her subjective and sometimes obscene is quite a natural reaction. In a review of Superstar India, anonymous says:

In a departure from anything else she has written, Shobhaa De lasers in on Indian people and their place in the larger human society, pointing out her country’s historical failings and equally historical glories. Admitting to our knee-jerk reactions to much of what is happening at home and in the world, De reasons, nevertheless, that the nation has earned Superstar status, and with humorous argumentativeness, she convinces the readers, that India is not about to lose its glow. (Anonymous)

Some critics claim that she has nothing new to tell but surprisingly that old too is still unperceived from common eye despite all thick and thins of ‘economic miracle, Indian cultural values, grand Indian weddings, poverty, sex, male chauvinism, Mumbai’s amazing spirit and political upheavals, Shobhaa has successfully portrayed the disorderly ordered India, ‘racing right back to a better life when any and every Indian can dream big and reach for the sky’.

**Shobhaa De's inclination towards feminist issues in her novels:**

To declare that a woman is a being, not an appendage but an autonomous being, capable of finding her own self is one of the primal and seminal concerns of Feminism. In its early stages feminism thought of Amazon – Utopias, an all-female world, but the recent trends are an indication that it's possible for a woman to live in the world where men also live. The deeper most concerns of the novelists in India have been the human
relationships, especially men-women relationships, and the functioning of female psyche. The contemporary novelists are entangled in the complexities of men-women relationships and subtleties of feminine consciousness.

The early image of woman in Indian English Novel as a silent sufferer, an incarnation of patience and endurance has gradually been eroded. The woman portrayed by the Indian Feminist writers is a picture of an independent, free-thinking individual. Women writers like Shobhaa De are conscious of the marginal status of woman in society. The study incorporated here includes major novels of Shobhaa De. The endeavour here undertaken is an analysis of her novels from feminist point of view.

Shobhaa De's novels have title beginning with S as does her first name. Certainly it's not a coincidence. According to Pushpinder Syal, *S is for senses and sex and self. And these, it seems, are the chief concerns of Shobha De's writing.* Shobhaa De's first novel *Socialite Evenings* is a story of middle class girl, Karuna. Her life begins in Bombay with Anjali, her mentor, dreaming of a career in modeling and films. Karuna hates her middle class origin; and to emerge out of it she neglects her boyfriend and marries "the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time." Anjali prescribes Karuna an antidote of the extramarital affair that proves fatal to her married life. She is divorced without the alimony.

She rejects the hierarchization of male values for the affirmation of her feminine self. Pramod Nayar finds, "The first real expression of her sexuality makes her feel unworthy of respect because she has imbibed the phallocentric notions of sexuality."

In fact, to be liberated is not a sinful act at all. It’s an effort to fulfill her emotional need and to attend the wholeness of personality. Unfortunately she gets aborted never to be a mother again. At last she returns to her parents rejecting an offer from a gentleman, she prefers to be single. She earns on her own and is contented. Though she can't get herself rid of the desire to flirt, she realizes that she has no future at all. Finally she discovers herself but has to pay heavy price for it. In fact, no moralist would like Karuna to fall in love with Krish but Shobhaa De, a modern feminist does not find anything immoral and disgusting. Here she captures the dichotomy of values in a very interesting manner. We
don't mind her frankness for concentrating on the dissatisfaction of woman's mind and body. The descriptions sometimes get filthy but there is nothing good or bad. Shobhaa De proves herself an iconoclast to shatter our idea that the nuptial tie is holistic and never to be broken at any cost.

The sexo feminist writer has set a stir to the feminist literature in India by choosing a nympho maniac as a central character of her second novel *Starry Nights*. Asha Rani is sexually exploited at the age of fifteen by her parents. She is forced to enact in the porno films, and offer herself to the producers and distributors. Even her uncle assaults her chastity. She has to pacify an M.L.A. of her father's age. Asha Rani falls in love with a top hero, Akshay but he is not ready to be a Muslim. Her journalist friend, Linda initiates her in pleasures of lesbianism but she too betrays her by revealing Asha's secrets for her own benefits. May be Shobhaa De hints at the bonding of sisterhood negatively. Asha Rani's affair with Abhijit also proves futile, who comes to her only for sex. As Abhijit is married, his father gives Asha ample of money. At last she marries Jamie Philips in New Zealand.

Her daughter Sasha also hates her for she doesn't like being called a bloody Indian. Shobhaa De concludes the story of Asha Rani dreaming of Sasha to be a film heroine in India. Through a degenerated society, De depicts woman's search for identity in a male world.

Through her novels De has tried to shatter patriarchal hegemony. Any sensible analysis of her literary works from feminist point of view will do well to bear this fact in mind. It's this factor that lends authenticity to Shobhaa De, though her fictional world has aroused curiosity and interest on one hand and denunciation on the other. Her explosive novel *Sisters* is unique for dealing with the psychic conflicts in its liberated woman protagonist. The novel focuses on the seamy side of business world as well as inner world of the protagonist, Mallika nicknamed Mikki. After the demise of her parents she takes charge of her father's industries that deprives her colourful life in America. Mikki feels obliged to make her step-sister Alisha her business partner. She breaks her engagement with Navin when she finds him a mere puppet in his mother's hands. Surprisingly, she hooks
herself in wedlock, though she has been enamoured of the life of freedom. She pleads him “I can look after you - we could work together - I won’t have to wait hours to see you.”

In fact, she is not averse to being a wife but she hates the inhumane subordination of the woman. As usual her husband proves a womanizer married already. He transfers all her property to himself and denies her motherhood to keep her always ready for him. As usual Shobhaa De's women search for personal freedom, denied which later rebellious by resorting to the unethical acts. Fortunately she gets rid of her husband after his accidental death. Her experience with him matures her from a mere social butterfly to a mature woman. Alisha serves as a foil to Mikki; both the sisters are different from each other. At last Mikki and Alisha get united. The novel comes to an end with both the sisters realizing the need to live together. Here Shobhaa De weaves bond of sisterhood in protest of the patriarchal setup.

Thus Shobhaa De's novels indicate the arrival of a New Indian woman. Her women protagonists defy rebelliously against the orthodoxy of patriarchy. They show the novelist's intimate understanding of the psyche of woman and her problems. (80)

‘Desperation is the world’s worst cosmetic!’ Shobhaa De in Shobhaa at Sixty:

A first look at her and you think she is fooling you. Sixty? Really? Women half her age get a severe inferiority complex getting worked up thinking what she has been up to. Her jealous rivals have accused her of being ‘a well-botoxed beauty’, something which is absolutely false and a fact she is critical of because she has always been against any form of surgical procedures. Does that matter to her? Does she care? Reading through her latest book Shobhaa at sixty – secrets of getting it right at any age, Shobhaa De reveals these secrets diligently to everyone who think they can do what she did to get there. And she has a ready answer to the most obvious question everyone throws at her in every possible public appearance, immaterial to what she is there for. Oh I just soak myself in vinegar every night and eat iron filings for breakfast. I’ve said earlier on a talk show, am
beginning to feel like a medical miracle or a pickled gherkin!’ she says with a giggle. It totally frees you from all hang ups, prejudices, anxieties. Personally, it has been an extraordinarily liberating experience. I am more open and receptive to newness,’ far more innovative in my approach, ready to go into unknown territory’, she adds when you ask her what the best thing about life is after 60. Oh! Yes, don’t forget she is the woman to be credited with the adage ’60 is the new 40’ and a significant percentage of the world population thanked her silently carving her name in history with a golden chisel.

Her latest book constantly takes references to her father who she says, was her inspiration in many ways. “Yes! He lived a much disciplined life.” Intrinsic good looks have nothing to do with you. You can’t take credit for that. So if you obsess over them or let your good looks go to your head, I think it’s a bit dumb because you’ve not worked for it. It’s a blessing and a gift. Respect it, don’t abuse it’, she says speaking about her early-life influences. A large part of her book is about the importance of physical looks. It almost contradicts with Shobhaa’s spiritual identity when she writes passionately about how to take care of your physical looks. “It’s really strong message I am giving to women not to give up on themselves. No matter what, once your sell-by date expires, in any society, especially Indian, once you are of a certain vintage, people look up to you in reverence. In most cases women give up on themselves. They lose their interest and zest for living. And a lot of it is connected to their physicality. They let themselves go and don’t care. And then they start complaining that society marginalizes them and the man they are married to, does not look at them anymore. They become invisible. After 40, women generally do become invisible in the world. So this is also to say you have to be a little proactive if it matters to you.

It’s a fact that women are expected to look and conduct themselves in a certain way in an increasingly patriarchal society. They are not just differentiated on how they look but also expected to give back to these ridiculous demands. In India there are only two matriarchal societies. One is in Kerala where the women are gorgeous and the other is the tribal communities in the north east. Matriarchal societies give women that assertive control over their lives, their money and property and a new confidence. Now confidence brings in a different kind of beauty altogether. Even for men. Look at Amitabh Bachchan
when he came into the movies. He has never been a good looking man. The charisma came later when he became successful. The sole function of most women in patriarchal societies is to give the heir to the family. And once they are menopausal and post-menopause even that function is gone. So what is their actual use? It’s a cruel world but what use are they to society? The minute they lose that society loses interest in them. So the message is strong on women to never give up on themselves. I do see a huge change in women from two decades ago and now. But it’s not change that I probably approve of or say ‘a wow!’ to. I find the younger generation in their 20’s, far more neurotic, far more obsessed with physicality, far more insecure and obsessed about this size zero, the gymming, the hair and they live with some kind of highly exaggerated idiotic notion of the perfect body, the perfect hair, the perfect face, the perfect bag, the labels and so on. We were very free of all that. While they work very hard, they are better qualified; they make more money, then why aren’t they happier? You go to any club; will you see any natural happy smiling faces? You see all preoccupied young girls worrying their heads off about a zit that no one can see but themselves’, she says with an air of experience of having seen it all before having written it all and expressed it through her books.

**Shobhaa De’s theories on Teens:**

According to her, the space for contemporary Indian fiction for teenagers has been empty for long. So, after penning such books like *Surviving Men* and *Spouse: The Truth about Marriage*, she has moved to teenage issues like working parents, weight, the I-have-nothing-to-wear syndrome, low self-esteem and of course, crushes.

*Shobhaa De is ‘Mom’ first and everything else later. It is the single most important commitment of my life. Being labelled a ‘diva’ is great! I enjoy it in the right context. But being a mother is a blessing*, says De.

Her book *S’s Secret* follows Sandhya’s life and speaks the lingo used by kids today. *We need to go beyond goblins, wizards and vampires if we want to connect with our tweens and reflect their lives in a more realistic way*, she adds.
De’s understanding of to deal with her own kids has taught her a lot and that understanding has gone into the making of her latest work. The simple rule in today’s day and age is this to understand your kids, learn to appreciate their music. If you can understand their ringtones, you’ll understand them, she says, adding, I mean Rihanna, Lady Gaga. You must ‘get’ their music and only then will you ‘get’ the kids. Rule number two: Keep talking. Don’t shut them out. Worse, don’t let them shut you out.

Criticism on Shobhaa De’s Work:

Shobhaa De, now a very popular name in India, came to fame as the founder and editor of three popular magazines Stardust, Society and Celebrity. She was consulting editor to Sunday and Megacity; she is a free lance writer and columnist for several newspapers and magazines including The Times of India, The Statesman and The Sunday Observer. She has been a successful many-in-one-editor, freelancer, columnist or rather anti-columnist, TV serial producer, woman, wife, mother and a popular figure. She has become so popular that within a few years of fiction writing she published three novels which became part of the curriculum of the Bombay University and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

One cannot but wonder if all the attention that her first work Socialite Evenings, got is well deserved. Published by Penguin, priced rupees fifty, the blurb on the cover says it is “an accomplished first novel by a remarkable writer”. Like western popular fiction writers who write about people and events in very high places, Shobhaa De writes about the ‘very rich’ in Bombay society. In one of her columns she mentions that a journalist found among the reviewers of the book, men like Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh being very favourable and women not favourably disposed at all. Her Socialite Evenings, is a work of considerable length and dubious depth about which it is difficult not to be heavily critical. All fictional works operate within a frame work of plot, character, and structure and outlook which determine, guide and define their content. The book is an uncritical beading of characters and events which are continuously adrift.
Socialite Evenings, is a record and a memoir of Karuna who rises from her dull middle-class status into being a celebrity and a success through a series of frustrations in personal, married and social life.

In a work which is essentially about the aimless, ambitious, idle and rich world of the affair-ridden women and the busy moneyed men, the reported success of a lonely aspirant Karuna to personal achievement should be considered as the focal point. In this book, marriage has no meaning beyond money, sex or indifference. The only marriage which lasts is that of the middle-class parents of Karuna. Beauty is skin deep, friendships fleeting, drift and diffusion is what one sees here. Socialite Evenings, is both superficial and ambitious. It begins on a grand and poignant note and collapses within a few pages as the content fails to support the intent. It is a poor work. (82)

Starry Nights, De admits, was an unabashedly sexy book. And I enjoyed writing it”. She says that it is “a dirty book” because it is about a dirty business: The dirtiest if you don’t include politics. How could I have written a deodorized, desensitized version about the Bombay film industry...? It is the story of Aasha Rani, a small town girl with a scheming mother who pushes her into the crass world of Bombay Cinema, No comments.

Sisters is a comparatively better organized and focused book, where the writer is familiarized with the craft of fiction writing. The scenario here is confined to the lives and homes of two half-sisters, Mallika Hiralal and Alisha. Sisters is certainly more readable when compared to Socialite Evenings. This rich idle alien world is devoid of any principle of religion and morality. For all the focus on female sexuality, Shobhaa De does not write like a feminist because the larger issues do not appear to be clear.

Shooting From the Hip, Shobhaa De’s selected writing, a big book, is surprisingly and refreshingly more easily readable than her fiction. Forced on to take the garb of people, her ideas fail to find a simpler and direct presentation here. Dedicated to her readers who made her what she is, the book gives her personal opinions expressed most informally regarding politics, media, stars and celebrities, gender issues, India and her people, Bombay etc., not as a serious critic but as a lay person.
The contents of Shooting from the Hip, under various headings are straight, informal and personal views of Shobhaa De about men and matters and gender issues. Her admiration and affection for Khushwant Singh, Maqbool Fida Husain, Vikram Seth, Sunil Gavaskar and Imran Khan, her regard to J. R. D. Tata and R. K. Lakshman become quite evident in these sketches where she also sizes up princesses, actors, actresses, producers and films - Diana, Rekha, Shabana, Amitabh, Om Puri, Mira Nair, Salaam Bombay and the City of Joy.

Shobhaa De pronounces sweeping judgments – on fitness freaks and compulsive joggers who crowd five star health clubs, who later wolf down five layered sandwiches and wash it down with beer, who do all that “to be seen doing the fashionable thing at the right place; she says: I am angry about Bombay parties where five hundred people are invited and everybody hates everybody else, and the men drink too much, the women flirt too much and a rotten time is had by all but the host and hostess who have been too busy recording the event for posterity on Video - to notice that their guests are about to commit collective hara-kiri with the Kabab skewers.” In another instance Shobhaa De remarks that all the people came on to the stage “more to be photographed with the legend (J. R. D. Tata) for posterity than anything else. Conclusions such as these often mark and mar her writing, being totally subjective, opinionated and prejudiced.

The section on “Gender Issues” is certainly the best as Shobhaa De writes with feeling and insight. Indian men strike her as being ten paces behind women who seem to be ready for any challenge, and they, the men, think of their supremacy in the most adolescent terms. (83) She says: Women the world over are given a raw deal- a rotten one. For this, second sex, second class citizen status has always been the system. The working woman, an economic reality, in the Indian middle class can surrender her pay packet to her mother-in-law and feel guilty - about the smallest personal expense. Yet her observation is that the voice of militant feminist groups is muffled in the “overall macho din”. She says that women’s shakti is destructive as well as creative and the maintenance of the equilibrium between the two opposing forces can lead to creative and dynamic harmony; she remarks: The very concept of the sexes locked in eternal battle is negative and destructive. She makes the interesting and truthful remark that there will be
complacent, placid women and meek, docile men; the quarrel is not to reach the top of
the human heap and stay there but about the race being run in fair terms and without
weighted handicaps. Women’s Shakti should be harnessed and put to good use, “to
ensure a more beautiful, creative, and productive world for ourselves.

Shobhaa De thinks that women have to assert their independence in order to claim their
identity in the society. K. K. Sinha rightly remarks, Shobhaa De stands for equal and
normal treatment to the woman in this hurly-burly world of ours. She is one of the
leading writers portraying the man – woman relationship especially in urban
metropolitan India. She stands for the New Woman – casual looking but ambitious,
professional focused and in control. She has an agenda, and she will work towards it
single mindedly and even alone if need be.

Shobhaa De’s novels fascinate “both men and women from sixteen to ninety. Sarbani Sen
comments, Shobhaa De is producing a desi version of an American best-seller where the
Indian ambience is merely an eroticizing on an unmistakably American cake.

Strange Obsession and critics:

The contrast between the two representations of same-sex desire and bi-sexual relations
discussed here is striking. While in De’s novel, lesbianism is linked with insanity and
indirectly albeit subversively criticizes patriarchal control without effectively challenging
its basis, in The World Unseen, lesbianism is conceptualized as a liberating alternative, a
different world from the conventional female one, the transition to which is, however,
still tentative and still incomplete. As far as bi-sexuality is concerned, Strange Obsession,
uses this as a remedial pathway back to an conventionally acceptable male-female
relationship, dramatized in the shape of a love triangle scene where Minx, gun in hand,
watches and directs Amrita and Rakesh’s love-making. By contrast, bi-sexuality in The
World Unseen is more clearly a temporary compromise and passage to something new:
clearly, the power no longer lies with heterosexual norms and patriarchal structures.

The above analysis has thus comparatively explored two, very different contextualization
of lesbian and bi-sexual relationship designs. In Strange Obsession, Shobhaa De merely
exploits the sensationalist aspects of lesbianism, transposing it onto a social stage which is associated with non-normative conditions and which builds on scandal as an integral tool of publicity. Lesbianism as a real life issue is drowned out in the exceptionality of the society displayed, and the smoke and mirrors set-up in which the motif is narrated is unequal to a serious negotiation of questions of female identity. Thus the space created by Minx is devalued because of her insanity and the travesty of male-female power differences which her relationship with Amrita emulates. Compared to this, Sarif’s style of embedding a lesbian story is less extravagant; at the same time, it nonetheless constitutes an embedding or wrapping strategy as she blends the subject of lesbian love with male violence and moreover, the discursively eminently acceptable layer of criticizing institutional political oppression in apartheid South Africa. The spaces constituted for women and female relations are still prescribed by other forces than those of female autonomy and identity searches.

*Shobhaa De’s uproarious gesture towards modernity praises heteronormative bi-sexual love and desire by violently pushing lesbianism back into the closet.* In this respect the bisexual sets the norm while the lesbian reflects the mad, the diseased and the abnormal. Discarding lesbian love and desire as shades in the make-up of Indian womanhood creates repressed individuals for the sake of an artificially societal, heteronormative reaffirmation. Such negative interpretations of lesbianism, together with the ‘abused’ trans-cultural life-worlds, then, slickly reaffirm essentialist gender conceptions. Shamim Sarif, by contrast, introduces a bi-sexual and lesbian life design in terms of a tentative awakening which criticizes rigid structures on the level of society in such a way as to challenge the concept of the nation, too. Apartheid South Africa, after all, is a location where the absurdity of an artificially homogenous concept of society is particularly obvious. Despite the fault lines apparent in both novels’ designs of female homosexuality, they however are indicative of a search for new ways of scripting relationships and spaces and writing them into recognition and respectability.
**Misconceptions of Shobhaa De’s Depiction of Women:**

Shobhaa De depicts sordid reality. She treats the taboo subject like sex with open-heartedness. She concentrates only on the problems of urban women and their psychology and neglects the rural women in her fiction. She deals with the problems of the neo-rich women who defy rebelliously against the moral orthodoxy of the age-old patriarchal social system. The image of a woman reflected in her novels is of a modern or ultra-modern rebellious woman who is strong and bold enough to achieve social and economic equality in male-dominated world. De is a feminist novelist with a serious purpose. Her novels are not only thrillers or entertainers or a series of ‘bodice ripper’. Though most of the eminent critics have neglected her as a major fiction writer for her free, frank and naked descriptions of battles of sex, her novels serve a purpose as an eye-opener to the Indians. She is an advocate of justice, liberty and equality of women.

Shobhaa De’s women do not reach to the height of Catherine in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, Devi in Nayantara Sahgal’s *A Situation in New Delhi*, Jaya in Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, Uma in Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting* or Eliza Doolittle in G. B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. However, De is a writer with a purpose.

Though she is condemned in a literary circle as a pornographic author, her point of view and intentions are apparently different. She is an advocate of sex and does not hide anything about biological phenomenon in her novels. Her novels reveal the Freudian psychology through the male and female characters. Her female characters of subjugated, marginalized, rebellious or neo-rich type have their own faults. They are devoid of real motives, intentions or feelings. The characters such as Anjali, Aasha Rani, Sudha Rani, and Swati are full of lacunas such as shallowness, thoughtlessness and craze for name, fame and glamour. Some of them have lust and some others are lured by economic gains. All of them seem to be caricatures. De depicts their weaknesses authentically, so they appear to be life-like characters. Shobha De intends to heal the injuries of female psyche in her imaginative fictional world through free and frank treatment of sex in marital bliss and sex as a curse in premarital or post-marital life. However, her heroines fight for the equality in a dogmatic and patriarchic Indian society.
Shobhaa De is much criticized for the presentation of women who wander about indulging in free sex, and living fashionable and wealthy life, but she is in no way seems to support the way of life adopted by these so called modern women. On the contrary, she shows her contempt and dislike for their unethical and socially unacceptable behaviour in a clear and effective way. The misunderstanding regarding her feminist stance possibly can be associated with her presentation of women who indulge in uninhibited sex and unusual social activities. The recurring depiction of these women’s behaviour and the minute details related to the sex act experienced by these women falsely create the impression that De is suggesting their life style as a model for women to experience real happiness, total freedom and an independent existence. But a careful study of her novels reveals the hidden motive in depiction of such kind of a bizarre life. It cannot be ascertained from the pronounced statements of her characters or from the activities in which these women participate. It may be deduced from the ultimate fate they are condemned to as a result of their indulgence in unusual activities and deviant behaviour. In this respect, Anjali, Aasha Rani, Sudha Rani, Meenakshi Iyengar, Noor, Swati, and all the other former schoolmates in Snapshots, are the best examples. In the end they all suffer because of their deviant behaviour. Thus, the types of women and their behaviour that readers find in De’s fiction confirm the post-modernist nature of her perspective.

There is no essential category of woman to which her women characters belong. In her novels she rather accommodates and depicts a variety of women with no category to be all inclusive or absolute. There are not only traditional and modern women that figure in her fictional world but also women representing lesbians, middle-class women, women cloning male behaviour. The novelist does not project any category of women or perspective to be the ultimate.

**Indian Ethos in Shobhaa De’s Works by Shashi Kant Gupta:**

Shashi Kant Gupta comments that *Shobhaa De has been given epithets like Porn Queen, Pulp Pasha and Vatsayani because the general impression and critical opinion about her fiction is that it is soft porno. It is true that she writes about sexuality and sexual*
behaviour, but she is more than this. De has also been described as a feminist, but she rejects this label. She does not want to be confined to the gender, and prefers to call herself a humanist.

The critics and scholars have ignored the moral values vested in De’s fiction. The book *Indian Ethos in the works of Shobhaa De* evaluates her work and attempts to establish that it contains many virtuous matters with focus on higher humane values which are helpful for emancipation of society through a scrutiny of past deeds. *The book delves deep into De’s fiction and finds that she has been criticized for negligible things which can be seen in any urban and sub urban society, particularly in a multi-cultural society where some sections are afflicted by infidelity and extra-marital affairs. De has, therefore, censured the things for which she has been criticized. The book discusses Shobhaa De’s work in a balanced way to bring out the basic Indian ethos and intellectual qualities present therein which are in line with the Indian subcontinents culture. The study will show that despite apparent glossy life of permissive high society, the novels in the end project traditional Indian values, emphasizing the importance of the family and marital fidelity. Permissiveness and various kinds of sexual behaviour are simply deviations, which are not approved of by the novelist. Her views in this regard are found in her non-fiction writings and interviews.*

Shobhaa De’s understands the “Cultural gap” in the growth of some generations of Indians, her defence of India and defiance of blind power groups and prejudiced groups, who ought to quit India, are certainly viewpoints which need to be considered.

The contradiction between her personal preferences and her fictional exercises becomes harder to be explained because of the obvious glee she, finds in writing them, as she confesses. It appears that she is a better columnist than a writer where her ability to sympathize with the vulnerable, desperately self-seeking, women like Pamella Bordes and the hunted, haunted, condemned people like gays, is quite touching and bold.

*De has been around the writing scene for more than a decade. Her smart writing style, sharp opinion and versatility have earned her both praise and critique as she remains*
firm to her views regarding both national and international political, economic and especially social scenarios. (84)

Comparison and Contrast between Shobhaa De and Shashi Deshpande:

Shashi Deshpande depicts her women as an emergent woman of the modern industrial age, who wants to achieve individuation and authentic self-identity without changing the culture and tradition of the society. Shobhaa De has successfully depicted her women characters as an individual with freedom of choices. She has projected the urges, dreams and desires of the upper class house wives who refuse to be suffocated by their environments. Let us see how the attitudes and behaviour of women differs according to the society she belongs to, by highlighting the works of Shashi Deshpande and Shobhaa De.

Indian English Literature in the recent past has attracted a wide spread interest, both in India and abroad. Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. Women writers in English present an insight and understand the dilemma which modern women are facing in a traditional society, where dual morality is the accepted norm, Self-willed and individualistic women have to face suffering caused by broken relationship. Women who are conscious of their emotional needs are striving for self-fulfillment, rejecting the existing traditions and social set-up and longing for a more liberal and unconventional ways of life.

Shashi Deshpande and Shobhaa De are the most accomplished contemporary Indian women writers in English. Let us see how the attitude and behavior of women differs according to the society she belongs to by highlighting the works of Shashi Deshpande and Shobhaa De.

Shashi Deshpande’s women think marriage hampers their individuality and it is more as a “trap” rather than bond. They look upon marriage as a system, which make one so dependent. They consider love to be a “big fraud, a hoax, a trap-a process of making one
humble and dependent (1983:173). Despite their disillusionment with marriage and all that it entails, they are able to preserve their identity, realizing their own personal and private limitations. Within the binding relationship they are finally able to affirm their own individuality; Deshpande upholds marriage as the backbone of the society, what is stifling is the persona of the wife and not the institution of marriage. When the heroine returns, it is with the determination to be an individual and not a mere role/persona.

One of the major reasons for Shobhaa De’s popularity as a writer is her treatment of the contemporary urban woman’s position and the challenges she faces. She is a modern novelist who recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down through her writings. She constantly tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against male dominance.

Shobhaa De’s women are more mature than their mates. Though in the Indian male-dominated society, women are marginalized by their husbands but Shobhaa De’s women are certainly different. Her women revolt against the traditional image of Indian women in words and deeds. In a sense, she is the forerunner of the emerging Indian women with her liberated womanhood.

Shobhaa De’s woman is a mouthpiece of the New Indian woman of the upper class society. Shobhaa De’s woman is the woman of action ready to break all social orthodoxy, which shows her determination to grab the huge fortune with a strong individualistic identity in a habitually male dominated society. She has power to smash the traditional image of woman and she has a strong hatred towards this patriarchal male culture. Simone De Beauvoir writes: What they demand today is to be recognized as existents by the same right as men and not to subordinate existence to life, the human being to its animality.

In her novels, woman characters are not victims of male chauvinism. They are also enjoying the same rights as men. Shobhaa De’s works reveal the trauma, insecurity and agony that lie beneath the opulence of such women’s lives. Once the women do not find happiness in marriage, they unhesitatingly go out in search of more fulfilling relationships. Nearly all her women have pre-marital sex.
Shobhaa De seems to mock the attitudes of the educated and sophisticated men who fail to look into the hearts of women. Most of the men fail to go beyond the boundaries of beauty, thereby debasing women to the position of mere celluloid dolls.

Both Shobhaa De and Shashi Deshpande have used the device of first-person narrative to ensure its credibility by making the protagonist read her inner mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern learned women.

When it comes to comparison, there are two types of roles played by women in Indian fiction: the conventional and unconventional. The conventional woman may sacrifice her happiness for the sake of the well-being of the family as a unit. Shashi’s characters represent this category who struggles to adjust rather than to get free from the traditional world. The unconventional ones are seen to suffer for their violation of accepted norms of society. Death is the only way for them, unless their experiences teach them to realize the wisdom of the traditional ways. Shobhaa De’s characters suffer a humiliation as for their social, economic and cultural life is concerned but they also find themselves capable of struggling, compromising and realizing their existence in the end.

**Language in her novels:**

Shobhaa De, the best seller novelist and a freelance writer for several newspapers and magazines is a budding flower in the realm of modern English literature in India. It is no exaggeration to say that her extraordinary language style and her revolutionary theme of the secret depths of the human psyche, particularly of woman have heralded a new conception in the realm of traditional thinking. She has created, like Arundhati Roy, a new and entirely original style that turns and twists language to conform to the feeling; a style that lulls us away from cheap sentimentalism to the world of poetic pattern and metaphorical structure. To Shobhaa De, a pure art has nothing to do with absolute truth. It shows the truth and the naked exposure of society. But she did it through the medium of art and beauty, feeling and form. Her novels *Sultry days, Starry Nights, Strange Obsession, Socialite Evenings, Sisters* and *Small Betrayals* (A story collection) are still sold like hot cakes in India and abroad. De’s simple language reveals her serious concern with human communication and interpersonal relationships. De has changed, moulded
and added her own to the existing forms and uses of English language by throwing away the conventional use of pure and standard language.

The language used by De, despite its lexical and grammatical aberrations, suits her characters. Different characters use the language according to their social status and professional requirements. An interesting example of De’s use of language can be observed in English laced with Hindi’, as used by a professional in the film world. But her clever use of the English language becomes a highly suitable medium for showing the true colours of her characters. A study of De’s novel yields new perspectives on the expanding literary horizon of the contemporary Indo-English fiction.
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