Chapter -7

CONCLUSION
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Shobhaa De is a living legend. She is more popularly known for her sensuous writings because she has written more openly and boldly over the issues which are considered taboos and are spoken only behind closed doors. Our orthodox society loves to read such material but criticizes the same in the open. That is the reason why her books and articles are bestsellers and yet meet criticism. Therefore, the general belief is that she is a writer with lucid and free flowing language but at the same time she is termed as a writer who is more than necessarily open to such issues which are not for publication. Shobhaa De, the best seller novelist and a free lance 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.

Shobhaa is a prolific writer, columnist and a great observer of the happenings of metro life and a mother of two young girls. She herself carved a niche in the literary circles and media with her sense of elegance and acquaintances with various celebrities starting from poets, painters, journalists, models, photographers to the Bollywood stars. Ones she has been described as the Lady Kushwant Singh in Indian jouno circles for her non-sparing and straight forward writings and on her criticism on snobbery shown by the so called public figures in public gatherings.

The multi-talented Shobhaa had done modeling, too, for some time. The gorgeous diva had informed in an interview held long back that, she would love to be called as the
sexiest granny to her grand children. That spirit might have made her to look like a sweet sixteen even today! The bold and beautiful Shobhaa has revealed the secret in staying young to her happiness. (1)

Shobhaa De has highlighted ‘Indian male as a counterpart of her female characters who have been painted with murkiest colours. In ‘Uncertain Liaison’, De has revealed, Indian men make the world’s lousiest lovers” as they are high on ego, low on performance.

Her explosive tale of love and betrayal exposes the hollowness of marriage system in Small Betrayals (1995) and in Shooting from the Hip (1994) Shobhaa De ventures to handle other genres of literature. It has presented the different snapshots of life with variety of sex. ‘Shooting from the Hip’ presents Shobhaa De as a versatile writer with diverse areas like politics, media, food, festival films, books and personalities and in her writing, she is straightforward and original. In Why I Write, she feels, ‘writing is pure sex.” Selective Memory: Stories From My Life (1998), is a story of candid writing of autobiography in which Shobhaa De appears as a daring daughter, a wife and a worried mother, an audacious, utterly liberated woman of post independence generation. In her Selective Memory, she writes, The woman you meet in Selective Memory may not be the woman you think you know. (2) The image of person in her autobiography establishes her as a skilful writer, deeply conventional, highly devoted and a shrewd judge of people.

From a supermodel to a super-writer and a super-mom, Shobhaa has been constantly wanted for her opinions and observations in popular media. Her interventions on public life are considered one of the most important and she is one of the most influential voices coming from Asia. What keeps Shobhaa composed, calm and going? Well, sometimes it can really frustrate you. Sometimes I just want to turn around and slap the men for the ridiculous questions they ask. I am called to speak on panels where many times I am the only woman. If I were to turn around and do the same with men, chances are they will take it for a compliment, she laughs. Coming from a woman who has efficiently handled magazines like her, it is a bit difficult to believe. When I started ‘Celebrity’ I realized I had no business sense at all. I am a creative person. I must not even try and understand
money. I still don't know much of a difference between terms like a million, ten lakhs and so on. I still get confused about it and I've given up. It’s not my headache. (3)

Everyone wants to know what Shobhaa thinks of the weather, the country’s politics, her favorite books, stars and so on. It is endless. Till date, her film reviews and articles are the most sought after within the media.

No wonder then that Shobhaa De has aroused a veritable storm and that fiery debate rages around her. Shobhaa De undoubtedly is a talented writer and one comes across some original insights and brilliant strokes in her works. Shobhaa De’s characters are spokespersons of her feminist novelist in the real perspective and it will definitely rank her among the leading stars in the galaxy of feminists in Indian writing in English literature as well as in the world literature as her three novels have been selected by the reputed school of Oriental and African studies of London, which identified her as a literary figure.

The worst aspect of writing, reminds Shobhaa De, whether it’s a memoir or a racy novel is that you can’t share the experience with anyone. It can be hellishly lonely sometimes. A feeling of such isolation, you ask yourself why you are punishing yourself like this. What for? There have to be better options (Selective Memory 3). Yet the expression of the self is a major feminist concern for her as “an unbearable pain reverberates through the entire body” (Selective Memory 3). A woman autobiographer finds herself in this awful predicament due to the oppressive effects of patriarchy which maintains double moral standard toward sexes. This attitude gets manifested in women’s autobiographies in both explicit as well as implicit ways. These spoken / unspoken ordeals, as pointed out by Shobhaa De, are very much pronounced in the autobiographies of Amrita Pritam.

Shobhaa De’s Unique Writing Style Became Her Identity:
The novels of Shobhaa De fall into ‘descriptive’ category. The style can be categorized as: (1) pompous and pretentious, (2) simpler, but little sentimental, (3) plain and brief in which the writer’s feelings are not directly indicated, and (4) employs a slangy, colloquial style. However, the inclination of stylistics towards linguistics constitutes its contemporary identity as a near independent study. It is here that we have to relate it to the Prague Linguistic Circle and the revolution in linguistics associated with Saussure and Charles Bally. Russian formalism looked upon a literary work as a 'structure' made up of 'devices' such as phonetic patterns, rhyme, rhythm, metre. Its 'literariness' constituted its uniqueness. (4) Hence a work of verbal art 'defamiliarizes' or makes strange the stale and jaded perception of life. However, for the formalists art is an autonomous and self-reflexive activity. It depends on an individual what style he or she should apply while writing a novel. Indian female writers have followed the traditional way of writing. But Shobhaa De, a post-Independence woman novelist, has applied her own style while writing her seven novels. (1)Socialite Evenings (2) Starry Nights (3) Sisters (4) Strange Obsession (5)Snapshots (6) Sultry Days and (7) Second Thoughts.

It is clear that Ms. De’s style is her own. It means her style is direct, forceful and she calls a spade a spade. She has her own knack of depicting people, events and places. Barring her fifth novel Sultry Days, other six novels have exotic settings, characters and places. Only Sultry Days is located in Bombay. Beginning her career as a model, film journalist and prose writer have helped her create her own space in the Indian writing in English, particularly, novels. For being a successful writer one requires tremendous command on language, while he/she is going to write. Shobhaa De, though B.A. in psychology, has tremendous command on English. Her keen understanding of human nature, her rich world of experience and her penetrating eyesight in the facts and persons have helped her develop her style. Her style is path-breaking. Not only her style but her themes are also path-finders which try to explore human mind, especially the woman mind. (5) Let us have some examples of her vivid depictions. Deb, in Sultry Days says to Nisha, I’m a seedha sadha fellow, you know that. Give me my daal roti, a warm-bed, twice-a-week maalish. That is all I expect. So tell me are you interested? (6)
Sometimes the writer becomes sentimental in her use of language. For example, in *Socialite Evenings*, she describes the mental condition of Karuna, after her divorce. She comes to her parents, who are old now and none is there to take care of them: *They needed me. And I needed them. They did not have a son to look after them in their old age. They had the enormous burden of an invalid daughter to cope up. Each day in their life was a major struggle to just get on with the living that remained. How could I abandon them at this point?* (7) Here, one sees a different Shobhaa De than the De who is known for her spicy language that describes sexy people and their sex activities. In her second novel, *Starry Nights*, there are many obscene descriptions. This is the description of Asha Rani. The style is clear and bare. No curtain. No pretension, neither on the part of the author nor on the part of her characters. That is the style of Shobhaa De. Her descriptions of sex acts are not enclosed in bed-rooms only. She can describe her men and women copulating anywhere, say the toilette of plane (as in the *Starry Nights*) or cabin of the office (as in the *Sisters*) or a back seat of a car (as in the *Socialite Evenings*). This is the style of Shobhaa De!

Shobhaa De is a writer with a difference and happens to be the pioneer and unconventional in Indian writing in English. Her characters seem to be leading toward primitiveness, but in the guise of modernity. One can describe this trend as a ‘neo-primitivism’. One can say that Shobhaa De is now not only confined to the Indian writers’ world but she is now the global writer because her novels are appreciated in the Western countries, too. However, Ms. De’s novels represent and depict only 2% people in India and not the masses. One feels, while studying her novels, that her women are ‘men’ in the body of women. Ms. De is not only an expert in woman psychology but also human psychology. *Though Freud has divided human psychology as ‘male psychology’ and ‘female psychology’, the researcher’s guide, denies this division as out-dated. According to him, there cannot be anything like ‘the male-mind’ and ‘the female-mind’. He said while opining on the female characters of Shobhaa De.* Though men and women both are prone to deviation, Ms De’s female-protagonists are more prone to deviation. However, the novelist does not suggest any solution to the predicament of her heroines nor do they themselves find any solution. There are no villains in the novels of Ms De. Her heroines are themselves villainous, because they are psychic, abnormal and maniac.
There is not any external force (except in *Sisters*); their inner force is responsible for what they face. *(8)*

Shobhaa De is an expert in depicting both: the inner as well as the outer mind of her characters. She has deep knowledge of human psyche, especially-women psyche, as she herself is B.A. in psychology. As the author she is herself a globe-trotter, her novels also have a global touch. The setting of her novels is exotic. There are exotic places, people, food items and various brands of wines and cigarettes. If a list is made of the names of food items used by her in all her novels, it will make a menu-card of a five-star hotel. That is the same case with wines, cigarettes and various designer clothes. This is so because her characters belong to a five-star category. One can find character like Deb, *beedee-smoking*, wearing poor *kurta-pyjama* and speaking slangy language, only in *Sultry Days*.

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. Some critics say that its *cunt and cock* lingo. Let it be as it is. But 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: *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.* *(9)* Or 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 neighbour Pushpa, the soup, which she was cooking spills on the stove in the kitchen. Her husband reprimands Maya. At this time Maya ponders: *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.* *(10)*
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…have any of you studied ’Kamsutra’? Fascinating. It is a pity we got brainwashed by some frustrated, repressed bigots. I think sex is a celebration-the highest form of religion. (11)

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 many 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.

Shobhaa De’s comment on the growth of her books - A writer’s mind is not static, there are bound to be changes in what one is writing. Socialite Evening, was my first book and I still love and adore it. It was so from the heart; it’s from the gut, and so unselfconscious with all its raw edges, but I couldn’t have remained stuck in that, and I couldn’t have remained stuck as the editor of Stardust that was 40 years ago, even though people still associate me with it. I still continue to model a lot, believe it or not, at my age it’s very flattering. I’ve been asked to be a show-stopper at fashion shows and if it’s a charity-linked event, I’ve done it. I don’t wish to remain at point A; my writing is a reflection of
all that I have lived, and experienced and enjoyed. The change is evident in every book. It would be kind of boring to write the same old book a hundred times over.

Shobhaa De preoccupies an outstanding place in modern Indian English writing. De is marked with her feministic literary approach. She is one of those contemporary women writers who are very sympathetic towards women and their problems. Being a professional journalist she got the opportunity to look at them quite differently as well as inwardly. Like other women novelists, her major concern is women and their feminine issues including identity crisis, gender conflict, marriage and painful experiences. She is whole heartedly concerned with the cause of women, complete emancipation of “the second sex” . As S.S. Kanade says, De is quite sympathetic towards women characters. Hence woman is the central consciousness of her novel.

Though she is labeled with stigma of feminism, she is not the typical western feminists like Julia Kristeva, Germiane Greer, Betty Friedan. In fact as a novelist she depicts the very idea of emancipating and empowering women who are marginalized in the Indian patriarchal construction. She always holds her mighty pen for them to depict their fight for freedom and right and also to reveal their inner pangs they suffer still in the male centered society. Shobhaa De says:

*I did write with a great deal of empathy towards women.*

The wave of so-called feminism has moved the recent trend of Indian writing in English and it has ushered new mode of expression in Indian writing in English. The depiction of hapless condition of women, including their marital conflict and status has been a very trendy phenomenon now. Women’s life, attitude and status are now rapidly changing with the passage of time. These changing perspectives of woman as individual have been vividly focused in De’s novels. Like other women novelists— Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapoor, Anita Desai, Shobhaa De brings out the changing image of traditionally confined women, especially married women. But she treats the theme differently. She feels that a true change should emerge from the psyche of women.
Thus, from the foregoing study of Shobhaa De’s novels it can be concluded that though De is criticized, as ‘pornqueen of pulp fiction’, ‘the softporn star’, the writer of the ‘bodice ripper’, or the ‘Jackie Collins’ etc., she is definitely a writer with a purpose. In reply to above criticism she makes a sarcastic comment thus: “Had my books been written by a man they would have been called ‘provocative’ or even ‘courageous’. But because it is a woman who is writing, they become pornography.” (12) Taking this into consideration, it can be asserted that one may she is the celebrity writer who has contributed in her own distinct way to Indian novel in English.

In 1927 an article entitled Feminist – New Style in Harper’s Magazine 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 feminity, a woman who can happily combine pleasure, career and marriage. To the advanced young man of the time, this new woman seems the perfect companion- fearless, bright and eager to participate in work, in play, in marital sex. We know this image might be admired but not easily accepted by the Indian males. Shobhaa De, however, shapes her women in the above frame.

**Shobhaa De’s belief in being human:**

Vulnerability is not something Shobhaa will be caught displaying but the fact is that she is as open to hurt and bewilderment as the rest of us. That she's been constantly judged as an extension of her very glamorous, very frightening persona, is something that causes her some discomfort, though she loathes admitting it. (13)

*Sometimes it gets on my nerves, just the pressure of it. Having to conform to people's expectations is boring. Some people who meet me on a one to one basis do see beyond the veneer, the facade, and I enjoy those interactions, they mean a lot to me. Many don't have the insight or intelligence to look beyond the facade, that's their problem. I can't go around saying that's a person created by the media, this is the real me. I don't care anymore!*
Tomorrow, she says, she can walk away from it all. *Nothing is that important to me career wise, there are no goals I'm feverishly working towards, no ambition that I'm going to kill myself for. I'm doing what I enjoy and at this stage of my life it's what I want to do.* That she enjoys writing is quite evident; consider the amount she manages to do!

That all of her writings always provoke reaction is something else she's learnt to live with. *I don't align myself with anybody; I'm completely independent as a writer. I don't have to please anybody so I don't suck up to anybody. I can do what I want to, I don't have to care about offending anyone,* she claims. *Everything about my life has been a happy accident! I've never really gone chasing anyone for anything. It was always all these beautiful things that came searching for me. Yes, once I got it, I gave my 110% percent to it. I don't take shortcuts and I like to give whatever it is, my best shot,* she says.

It can be very tiring for anyone to live up to such a carefully cultivated image and Shobhaa is no exception. *What I feel increasingly bugged by is the pressure to look a certain way. I'm really indifferent about my appearance, it's never been important enough to me to present this glamorous vision to the world. I don't care about playing to the gallery but people feel shortchanged, let down, if I'm anything else and sometimes that can get annoying. But on the other hand I enjoy the image on many levels. It suits me; it works for me, why should I fight it? I should play with it; turn it around to my own advantage.*

And this, she really does very well. She continues to play a part to perfection, she continues to write books that cause the establishment to have apoplectic fits and she continues to be Shobhaa De. *How does she survive herself? I think it's my sense of humour. I don't take Shobhaa De that seriously. I take that persona with a fistful of salt and so does my family. I feel very detached the rest of me. I'm very clear about who I am, where I come from where I'm going, there's no dichotomy in my head, no confusion. The two roles never overlap. I can play both very well, in fact I can play the other very convincingly because I know what the real self is deep down and I never fool myself. That's my strength. The facade is for fun. I know me. And I'm not such a tough person to survive!*
Mrs. Shobhaa De often speaks of her mind and has been a fluent speaker and adept writer in contributing her writings to various newspapers. She generally writes on the topics of both national and international importance. Various decisive of India and world find place in her writings. She is the perfect example of writing on the day-to-day problems faced by the state, nation and the world. (14)

Shobhaa De’s novels may not be models of literary artistry, nor do they weave intricate plots or reveal deep psychological insights, but the truth is her books are highly readable. Just where does the attraction lie? Or can De’s readers find some kind of moral/inspirational/ stimulus or even alternative to their own humdrum existence? Penguin India has had no doubts about the market value of De’s literary output and the author herself harbours no false illusions about the quality of her efforts. In her own words she writes ‘readable thrash’. It seems therefore that one must succumb to the inevitable conclusion: De uses sex simply to provoke, titillate and sell. It is difficult to separate the persona of Shobhaa De from the characters portrayed in her novels. Can a novelist who is blatantly cashing in on an image of super-bitchy really worry about improving the status of uneducated village women? Do dowry deaths and sati victims really bother her? Feminist critics do not hesitate to vilify De, arguing that her overwriting of the body merely reiterates the well known cliché of the woman as passive recipient or empty vessel. Indeed one could argue that De’s women characters (and her men) are reduced to sex machines by which the Gandhian notion that man is a brute and only rises above the animal in so far as he observes restraint in Shobhaa De’s books. On the contrary, animal excess is celebrated with characters reaching their climax (Starry Nights 248). If we accept that an egalitarian sexual relationship between a man and a woman is not possible there are a few viable options left available to women. Because celibacy is not usually viewed as a positive option are left for Shobhaa De’s women. Karuna in Socialite Evenings opts for the traditional heterosexual relationship, she even gets married, but she decides not to have children, thus denying herself one of the few ways of achieving power in Indian society by becoming a mother.

De’s most indignant critics accuse her of producing pornography as they interpret her works as being a pathological obsession rather than a celebration of the female body. (15)
Shobhaa De signed up for the international MBA program with Jaro education on 21st Sept, 2012. She emphasized the importance of education. She said that there was no age limit to study and India’s strength was education as it is a young country.

She grows old but refuses to age. That's Shobhaa De for you — prolific author, one-time editor, long ago model but all-time icon. She turned 60 around the same time India celebrated its 60th Independence Day, and that’s when she came out with “Superstar India”, a saucily appropriate title to sum up the parallel she was drawing between her personal experiences and the trajectory of a young nation. And now at 62, she has turned to more personal matters. In her recently published Shobhaa at Sixty: Secrets of Getting it Right at Any Age (Hay House India), she looks back at her own six decades and shares advice about enjoying one's time as a senior citizen. Advice is never welcome if it comes from someone who has done everything right the first time round. Luckily, the author is frank about her own mistakes and drawbacks, and in coming to terms with them inspires others to be as frank.

Shobhaa De at sixty sizzles and brings to the table the wisdom of an intelligent woman paired with the curiosity of a teenage girl and the aspirations of a hopeful and responsible global citizen. Her zest for life is unparalleled and unmistakably inspiring. For years to come, Shobhaa De will continue to remain an iconic aspiration and that every girl has and a versatile muse to millions of her readers and fans across the world. And it is to this very notion of exemplifying beauty one must toast three cheers to! May her tribe increase!

The word retirement is not in the De vocabulary. There are many more books to come from Shobhaa; she will be launching a new book soon and this time getting into the biography of young Bollywood stars, a segment where there are no Indian authors exploring youth living in urban India. I want to continue writing till my last breath. It is what I find most exhilarating and challenging, she declares.
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