Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION
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It is said that those who rule the word rule the world and since men ruled the word, historically dominated the roles of authors; therefore, a deep-rooted gender-bias became a part of our historical and textual tradition. The significance of the immense potential of women would have remained confined to the margins had the world not produced reformers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, J.S. Mill, Simon de Beauvoir and the likes of them, whose persistent efforts gradually shifted the emphasis from andro-texts to gyno texts. Consequently feminist consciousness emerged as the new spirit of the age. No doubt, in the beginning it was an individual trend, but it has global relevance now and, in most cases, it’s coming out of a genuine desire to make a difference. Indian women novelists too have concentrated on women’s problem in their work and are expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a variety of themes from a feminine eye without adopting feminist postures. The Four autobiographers namely Nayantara Sahgal, Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, and Shobhaa De cannot be termed strictly feminists. Their life-stories do not voice a kind of protest but we find a strong sense of freedom in them. Their life-stories however truly exhibit their inner voyages and a woman persona within and without. Here are the four women autobiographers who have subverted the marginal position and acquired an independent position in the male dominated Indian society. Nayantara Sahgal, Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das and Shobhaa De have expressed innermost desires and wishes of twentieth century Indian woman. They are the real selves of New Indian woman. Though born and brought up in the conservative environs of twentieth century India, they have been proved distinctly individual. Born with a female body, possessing feminine qualities they have been turned out as new women with strong determination. They possess strong sense of freedom. Neither have they ignored their responsibilities. What was just a beginning in writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Das and Amrita Pritam has assumed a strident posture in Shobhaa De and others.

Considering Shobhaa De’s Selective Memory as an explosive autobiography, we feel that hers is a life larger than life. Born in a middle class Maharashtrian Brahmin family of the magistrate of Satara, Rao Saheb, in 1948 Shobhaa De’s birth was not much welcomed by
the women of the family. Her mother and grandmother expected her to be a second son of the family. However, her father rejoiced her birth and considered Shobhaa as the luckiest child of the family. After her birth her father was appointed as a government official in Delhi. De had a much pampered humpty-dumpty childhood. Later on her father was again transferred to Mumbai. Right from her childhood De and her siblings were supposed to follow several codes of conduct prescribed by her father. In the last few chapters of her life-story, De maintains that ‘being economical’ was one of the middle class attitudes she had imbibed. When De had chosen her career in modeling at the age of eighteen, her father did not approve it. Her mother silently supported her. Her life story perfectly depicts her mental conflict. She pursued her career and did not surrender to her father’s wishes. She remained a super model for five years and changed the career when Mr. Nari Hira appointed her as the editor of *Stardust*. Later on she also started her own magazine *Celebrity*. De has portrayed beautiful pen-pictures of the most of the stars of the film industry. Her tone is simple, straight forward but very effective. The new *Avatar* of De as a new woman comes to the fore-front when she has to close her magazine – *Celebrity*. She turns out to be penny-wise and pound foolish. Her ten years long marriage is also on rocks. Her father does not support her. She has to give salary to other staff-members working for the magazine. At such a time of crisis her cousin supported her and she changed her office into his apartment. Shobhaa does not complain but accepts that she had tumbled down in the hole made by herself. Very heroically she encountered her circumstances. Meanwhile she divorced Sudhir without complaining and married the same day to Mr. Dilip De – father of Radhika and Randeep. The, most striking fact about De’s life is her role as a mother of six-kids. She turned out to be a mother of not only Aditya, Avantika and the younger two daughters – Arundhati & Anandita but also of Randip and Radhika – kids of Dilip De. She always terms Randip as ‘My Son’ though she is not a biological mother to him. It is overwhelming to have a look at her family photographs in the chapter entitled ‘Naming Names’ in her life-story. In this rapidly developing world where people do not have time to stand and stare and career oriented couples prefer fun-oriented childless lives; De’s life with her family is heaven on earth. Her book *Speed Post*, is a luminous record of marvelous tips given to her adolescent kids.
Herein, we find a new woman mingled with new mother worrying about the character-
building of new generation to which her kids belong to. De has no regrets. She has played
all her roles very well. She enjoys each moment of life. In the beginning of her marriage
life with Dilip she too had her lot of quarrels and troubles but then she came out as a
winner. De firmly believes that one has to work hard to make the relationship last long.
As a part and parcel of Indian middle class, she likes to be called a ‘married woman’ and
that’s the reason she remarried. Though the public image of De is that of a high society
jinks. She is at bottom a self-made middle class woman with a degree in human
psychology and ready to break all the barriers that come her way. Thus, she is a towering
20th century Indian woman. Though she revolted at individual level, basically she is an
Indian woman and proud to be so. Not very welcomed at the time of her birth but proved
excellent through her deeds she voices the core emotions of all the daughters of India.
She has taught India to be proud of her daughters forever.

**Shobhaa De on her writing desk:**

Shobhaa De, one of India’s bestselling authors, presents the modern Indian woman at the
centre of her fiction. Her various books with *Penguin India* – the novels (*Socialite
Evenings, Starry Nights, Sultry Days, Sisters, Strange Obsession, Snapshots and Second
Thoughts*), three books of non-fiction (*Surviving Men, Speedpost and Spouse*) and an
autobiography (*Selective Memory*), all highlight her attempts to find ways by which
women can survive and cope in a world that's cruel to them. She clarifies however that
her brand of feminism is not about women getting up and fighting for their rights, but is
more sly and subversive. The character Anjali in *Socialite Evenings* sums up De's
philosophy when she says: *Men feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient women. They
prefer girls like me-dependent dolls--You should try it--see how much more you can get
out of him that way.* In De's self-help book for Indian women, *Surviving Men: The Smart
Woman's Guide to Staying on Top,* she gives similar advice and suggests that in order
to "train a man to any level of competence," women should use "a) food, b) sex, c) food
and sex."
The erotic content of her novels has been somewhat controversial. De makes her female characters break sexual taboos and put forth candidly what they always felt but were too afraid and inhibited to show. Conversely, she realizes that this aspect of female sexuality is still hurtful to men as, it could mean women talking about being bored with their husbands sexually, mentally or spiritually. “The very fact that sex is no longer the most dreaded and despised three-letter word in India is enough reason to celebrate”, she says with unfeigned glee. She recommends a mature attitude to sex wherein it should be something special, something shared something beautiful.

Love is a major motivating factor for women in all her novels though it takes various forms: sometimes aggressive and destructive (like in Strange Obsession which has lesbianism as its theme) and at other times submissive, innocent and child-like (personified, for example, in the character of Maya in Second Thoughts). Her fiction often focuses on an exhausted generation of neglected wives who yearn for companionship and appreciation which invariably eludes them. As Rita remarks sarcastically in Starry Night, We demand communication, attention..! arey baba forget it. We should be happy if our husbands don’t beat us, burn us, torture us, insult us, and discard us. That is all. Interestingly, it’s not just bored and frustrated housewives, but also hardened and cynical women who are vulnerable to the eternal feminine fantasy of a partner for whom she would mean the world. Most of the times however, De highlights the futility of this emotional surrender because of a man’s innate inability to reciprocate it. As Rashmi (a character in her novels Snapshots) asks: But was any man worth a woman’s love?

Thus, the archetypal Indian male in Shobhaa De’s novels has been painted in the murkiest colours. She obviously believes that Indian women have changed qualitatively, are a part of the modern world, and ready for the new millennium. But the Indian male is still trapped by history and refusing to be shaken out of this torpor. This imbalance deals a major blow to the institution of marriage. Hitherto it had provided for society’s need for love, security and children, but in the fictional world of Shobhaa De, it is not regarded as essential. In a country where women rarely bare more than two inches of leg and hardly
ever file for divorce, she writes about women who, like herself, flee marriages because they are bored. This woman is bold, daring and ambitious. In Shooting from the Hip, De writes: *The terms underlying marriage have been redefined in recent times. If a self-sufficient woman with a roof over her chooses to marry, it is because she wants to share her life with someone in the fullest sense, not because she is looking for a life-long meal ticket. Divorce too has got to be viewed in this light. A woman of independent means is not compelled to perpetuate a bad marriage because she has nowhere else to go.*

Interestingly, almost all her novels are women-centered, focusing on the predicaments of women in family and society. Her major concern in her novels is to delineate the theme of marriage and man-woman relationship. Almost all of them present this theme because marriage is not only an institution but also destination for the couple. But there is a change detected in the modern scenario. Her novels project the picture of conjugal relationship affected by various reasons like “big city fashionable life”, “industrial advancements”, “modern lifestyle”, “capitalistic attitude” and so on. In many of her novels the bond of marriage is not permanent and the causes may vary from one novel to the other. According to Priya Wanjari, a literary critic, De depicts: …the lives of young men and women, particularly rich upper class people who no longer considered faithfulness and constancy in love a virtue. That is why he depicts the people in their true colours i.e. what they are rather than what they should have been. As such majority of the women in De’s novels do not have reverence for their marital and familial bonds and marriage is for convenience and for status and not the source of ultimate gladness. They are not serious about the marriage and have no hesitation to fix up extramarital affairs also.

However, her recently published non-fiction work *Spouse: The Truth about Marriage* debunks the image that most Indians have of Shobhaa De being a man-hating feminist. In it, she wholeheartedly endorses marriages and says emphatically; *Don’t knock it till you have tried it.* She stresses that there is no formula for a happy marriage and that nobody has all the answers. For her, marriage is memory. If the good memories outnumber the bad ones, it's fair to declare the marriage a success. She further believes that there are no
permanent highs and lows in marriage and that the only permanent thing about it is our
desire to be in a long-lasting and loving relationship.

Simultaneously, Shobhaa De goes on to emphasize that eventually every man-woman
relationship is a power struggle either on an overt or subliminal level. Very often we find
De exploring the difficulties that women face in balancing careers and marriage in a
male-dominated society, thus highlighting the economic aspect of this power-play. She
stresses that 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. Her novels emphasize the value of
equivalence of power. A pertinent example is *Starry Nights* which is a feminist work of
sorts. The starlet is used and abused throughout, but in the final pages of the book, she,
her sister and her young daughter walk off into the sunset with self-respect and "an
income to match". The ending once again brings out Shobhaa De’s emphatic statement:
*The women in my books are definitely not doormats. They are not willing to be kicked
around.* (6)

Shobhaa De’s fictional world has aroused curiosity and interest on the one hand and
downright rejection and denunciation on the other. The works of this “high priestess of
gossip and innuendo” has been regarded as “equivalent of Hindi films with their peephole
voyeurism.” When first published, Shobhaa De’s novels evoked hostile reviews. *Socialite
Evenings* for example, was branded as a “high society potpourri, bland and banal”
.bristling with orgy –laced parties and ‘voyeuristic servings of souped-up, four wheel
drive-sex-in-all-direction’. Another reviewer found it ‘choked with listless lust’ and
criticized its “witless lust” and criticized its “witless dialogue”. *Starry Night* with its
brazen portrayal of sex and ‘sexploitation’ steals a march over the earlier novel, was
described as” confession of man-eater. Despite their titillating details, what Shobhaa De’s
novels indicate, is the arrival of a new Indian woman eager to defy the well-entrenched
moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. Her novels are not just a series of
‘bodice ripper, they are serious attempts at ‘discovering India through Indian eyes’. One
may not like everything in De’s fiction, but her treatment of the contemporary urban
Indian woman’s challenges, predicament, values and life-style is surely nit without significance. De herself would consider the treatment of the identity of woman as the most significant contribution made by her work. Shobhaa De’s novel Snapshots presents snapshots from the life of six women who were friends at school—‘the girls’ from Santa Maria High School, leading predictable, mundane lives of domesticity and imagined bliss’. These friends had drifted away in due course and ‘disintegrated through marriages, transfers and unshared interests.

Shobhaa De’s novels have emphasized the value of equivalence of power. Whenever this balance collapses, there is tension in society and double dealings and hypocrisy predominate. The novelist can easily visualize a change in this respect taking place in the contemporary society. This new women is keen to get the equal powers like men as De writes

\> 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 overall human development. The very concept of 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 leads to creative and dynamic harmony. \(^{(7)}\)

But men, she says, are not willing to accept it and - “Many men expressed their anxiety over the changed power equation.”

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. De says, the average Indian woman’s conjugal life is “an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left” and marriage is “like a skin allergy, an irritant”. But she is not afraid to face this irritant, this allergy. She boldly and defiantly encounters it. 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.* \(^{(8)}\)

De realizes *Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to.* She gets used to this stereotyped social institution in the course of time. She detests the stand of fish and callous attitude of the husbands who often kept themselves busy in drab monotonous activities like reading the business pages of *The Times of India.* But despite their laxities, a husband was above all, a sheltering tree, a rock to the wife. They were not wholly bad or evil and the wife as a woman was only a peripheral being.

Significantly enough, the term ‘power’ and its synonyms have been reiteratively used in *Snapshots.*

*Who would know about the power game, never give yourself to any man for free, you know why? Men don’t value anything they get so easily. That’s why we are here, to satisfy their lust, not for sex but power. 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’ll kick you in the gut.* \(^{(9)}\)

**Awards and Accolades:**

**International champagne brand honours Shobhaa De (With image):**

French champagne brand Veuve Clicquot will Friday honour author and columnist Shobhaa De with the Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year award for her accomplishments, an official said.
De, 64, is the only other Indian woman to be honoured with the award after Bangalore-based entrepreneur and Biocon founder Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw. She was the first Indian to be honoured with the award in 2007.

As a part of the honour, a vine has also been baptised in De's name in the Veuve Clicquot Vineyards in Reims, a city in the Champagne-Ardenne region of France, around 130 km east-northeast of Paris.

The award was instituted in memory of Madame Clicquot and honours her entrepreneurial spirit and tenacity to succeed in the business world.

An elated De said she was deeply honoured by the tribute and that she believed there is a little bit of Madame Clicquot in every woman.

When asked how she feels about a vine being baptised in her name, De said the vine that stands in Reims, amidst Veuve Clicquot's vineyards echoes one common sentiment - empowered women equal an empowered world.

"When I saw the Indian tricolour flying near 'my' vine, and my name on a permanent plaque, I was thrilled beyond words. It was a truly magical moment. Women across the board, when pushed against the wall or the proverbial 'glass ceiling' display true grit and determination to beat the odds," De said.

"By honouring me, the Veuve Clicquot Business Woman Award honours the half a billion women of India," she added.

Regarded as the 'Oscar' of female entrepreneurs and business leaders, the Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year award, celebrates entrepreneurial women who have made a substantial contribution to business, society, culture and beyond.

"Shobhaa De embodies Madame Clicquot's qualities of entrepreneurship spirit, audacity and determination, besides demonstrating the persona of individuality, courage and boldness. Therefore she truly deserves the recognition," said Gaurav Bhatia, Marketing Director for Veuve Clicquot in India.
Further speaking to IANS about the award, Bhatia said that the Veuve Clicquot Business Woman Award was instituted in 1972 and is now conferred within 25 countries to inspirational women achievers.

"Since its institution 40 years ago, 300 women from across the world have been conferred the award. As a tribute, we have awarded these powerful women with a vine baptism ceremony where they have the rare privilege of christening a vine in their own name," he said.

"The Award recognizes the very same qualities that make them worthy descendants of Madame Clicquot, who was herself a pioneer in a world oft-reserved for men only," he added. (10)

2) She was a regular participant in the important debates which were taking place on television channel, ndtv as one of editor’s verdict in the year of 2009 during elections. She gained recognition for social commentator as well as popular authority on culture. Most inimitable style of her such as straightforwardness as well as honesty is remarkable in Indian history. Due to development of internet technology and community networking websites, her works are still in demand. Chandigarh University invited her as one of the chief guest at the campus in the year 2007. “New trends in contemporary writing” was the topic on which she delivered a complete presidential address in the English department of the university. She was energetic participant at Melbourne festival for writers, kitaab festival which was held at Mumbai, Hong Kong writer’s festival, Singapore writer’s festival and many more. She got invitation for Karachi lit festival in 2011; Maldives hay lit festival in 2010, kovalam fest and S.A. festival for Indian author in 2009. She became the member of Indian delegation which visited France for universal women’s forum in the year 2008.

Discovering Shobhaa De

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 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 underestimate 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.

In the final analysis one may not like everything in De’s fiction but her treatment of the contemporary urban woman’s challenges, predicament, values and life-style are surely not without significance. Through her novels and essays, she has tried to shatter patriarchal hegemony, by vociferously drawing attention to women’s exploitation, discrimination and commoditization in the Indian ethos. If De packs a punch in her writing, her everyday speech is just as direct. If the contents of my books have shocked India, well, they did. I don’t want to explain, complain and certainly never apologize, (11) she says defiantly. Undeniably, Indian contemporary writing owes a depth of substance to this enterprising lady who has taken off from the literary launch pad and is soaring comfortably in the world of serious readers. At the end of it all, I wonder why Shobhaa De portrays herself as a woman with sharp fangs, obsessed with you know what, when she is actually a soft, gentle, often ethical human being and, above all, a caring mother and a doting wife. Maybe, if all writers were writing serious, straight-laced, conformist stuff, life would be dull; an occasional jester with a capacity to expose society is the most wanted person.
Voted by *Reader’s Digest* as one of ‘India’s Most Trusted People’ and one of the ‘50 Most Powerful Women in India’ by *Daily News and Analysis*, Shobhaa De is one of India’s highest selling authors and a popular social commentator. Her works comprising both fiction and non-fiction have been featured in comparative literature courses at universities abroad and in India. Her writing has been translated into many regional languages as well as French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish.

Shobhaa De is known to live life by her own rules. Declaring sixty ‘the new forty’, she shares some of her most intimate secrets that are valuable at any age. From beauty tips, dealing with anxiety and ageing to spiritual quests and seeking solace and tranquility, Shobhaa wants you to have a joyous and fulfilling existence.

In *Shobhaa at Sixty*, she helps the reader rejuvenate their life, giving wise, honest and practical advice on how to cope with the daily challenges and stresses we face in today’s fast-paced world. She shares her own experiences from her life spanning six decades, claiming the inspiration for penning this book was, in her own words, ‘to free people from the cage of age’.

De is primarily known as a gossip columnist, despite having worked on 17 novels – her 25-year-old *Socialite Evenings* now a Penguin classic – and appearing as a panellist on many television shows about women in India. This is, perhaps, because of her unapologetic stand on refusing to weave a narrative from the perspective of a victim – a role that most women writers in the subcontinent have taken upon themselves.

*Women are meant to write about suppression, depression, oppression and repression; I understand, but that’s not my life. I don’t want to glorify suffering or make women martyrs and victims in our society*, she explained. And she was honest about it: *It would be hypocritical*. Almost wishfully, she added, *It would be so much more pleasant if we could do away with the filter of gender.*

De also questioned why women have to be referred to by their gender before their profession. *I am against this categorization. You don’t say male doctor, male writer,
male sportsperson, then why woman writer? As a publisher myself today, I protest against tags like Chick lit, which are meant to communicate that ‘oh, we don’t take it seriously; we enjoy it and then chuck it away’. De’s disdain for all prescribed roles is underlined in her latest book, *Shobhaa at Sixty*. (13)

In our society, a woman is cast aside once her childbearing days are over. Once a grandmother, your role is to babysit your grandchildren, while others travel around the world. I have six children and I am a grandmother. But my cover breaks the image of what a 60-year-old should look like. (14)

But while she speaks openly and candidly against being categorized, she appears most comfortable in her role as a mother, in every way that society defines it.

Responding to a question by a woman in the audience who said her life plans are on hold while her two-and-a-half year old son takes up all her time, De said, a two-and-a-half-year old son is a tyrant. Forget about doing anything else until he grows up.

But, she was careful to add that a woman must not put her life on hold. *I believe all women are essentially born jugglers; we are built to multitask without any song and dance.*

When asked what she has to say about her next novel, pat came the reply,

*It is about an oily, sleazy, despicable politician in Delhi,* she said, adding almost incorrigibly: *I want my future novels to be even raunchier than the old ones.* (15)

An academic examination of her books titled, *The Fiction of Shobhaa De*, compiled by Professor Dodiya, features 40 critical essays by academics – Indian and foreign. Over a hundred dissertations on her work are in various libraries worldwide.

Recipient of several awards for her journalistic contributions, De writes prolifically for Indian and international publications. She runs four weekly columns in mainstream newspapers, including the *The Times of India* and *Asian Age*. She has been the writer of several popular soaps on television, including India’s first daily soap, *Swabhimaan*. She
also anchored a prestigious weekly show called *Power Trip* which featured India's billionaires as never before. She participates on a regular basis on important TV debates, such as *The Editor's Verdict* on NDTV during the 2009 elections. She is recognized as an important social commentator and something of an authority on popular culture. Outspoken and forthright, De chronicles today’s India in her own inimitable style, more recently via her blog and Twitter account.

Her books are best sellers in several regional languages, including Punjabi, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Bengali and Marathi. *Bollywood Nights* was launched at the *London Book Fair* in April 2007 and for the American market in the same year, by *Penguin International*. The U.K. edition of her work, *Superstar India* was published in April 2009. *Superstar India* sold over 100,000 copies in India during its first year, to establish a new record. It will be published in America in September 2009. *Glitzernacht*, was launched at the prestigious *Frankfurt Book Fair* in 2006, followed by 4 more titles in German, with an additional 3 to follow. The first of her Italian books, *Sorelle* was launched in Milan and Rome, followed by *Bollywood Nights* in May 2007. Her books are in translation in Spanish, Italian, German, Hungarian, Portuguese, Turkish, Russian, Polish and Korean at present. Her first book in its French edition was published by Actes Sud in 2010.

Whether it’s flagging levels of confidence or diminishing stamina, Shobhaa with her trademark wit and insight provides the perfect antidote. Laying great emphasis on family values and ties, she stresses on making each passing decade more meaningful and enriching while taking the time to enjoy the small pleasures of life. Leading by example, Shobhaa shows us just how much we have to look forward to, no matter what our age!

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. Stardust as a magazine turned out to be a fantastic reality check for Bollywood. Till then there were these sugary sweet sycophantic writings. Stardust broke a lot of rules even for the mainstream media too. It continues to be this demolition squad that the industry requires. It gave India a new language and is very proud of it. And we treated stars not like demigods but like human beings and if they were doing something obnoxious, it was said so. We didn’t do any ‘settings’ going by the Bollywood parlance today. They all were shocked but at the end of the day success shuts up everybody.

During the period of last ten year since she started writing fiction she has received a mix response, her hater present her as a princess of pornography. Whereas her admirer hale as a kind of queen among the story teller, having irresistible appeal to the reader. Thematically her novels are highly complex. They offer sufficient stuff to the critic to interpret them in varied way. Shobhaa De gives vivid picture of society and culture of contemporary India. She is a cycle of notable crossword puzzle. She is undoubtedly the most reactionary novelist.

Shobhaa De is one of the most popular and the most prolific writers among the contemporary Indo-English novelists. De’s treatment of a particular fictional world that has not been explored so far by any other Indo-English novelists secures an enviable place for her among the contemporary fiction writers. De’s ironical narrative stance and her critical understanding of the feminist concerns make her fiction unique, interesting and artistic.

Shobhaa De has often been considered not worthy of academic research and study, because of the doubt raised by certain critics about the literary merit of her fiction. She has been deliberately neglected and criticized for the treatment and presentation of sex
and sexual relationships in her novels. She has often been criticized as, ‘high priestess of gossip and innuendo.’ Her writings have been regarded ‘equivalent of Hindi films with their peephole voyeurism.’ Some critics have been so harsh against her that they are not ready to acknowledge the obvious fact of her being amongst one of the best-selling writers in India. Such critics attribute all of Shobhaa De’s success to her treatment of sex only. But a close study of Shobhaa De’s fiction reveals the biased and unjustified nature of these comments.

It is uncharitable to think that Shobhaa De’s novels been recognized by the Bombay University without giving any consideration to literary merit. Even if her novels had not received recognition in the literary and academic institutions we could not have denied her the rightful literary examination simply because she has treated sex in her fiction. Even earlier writers like Sasthi Brata and Khushwant Singh have been criticized for the same reason. The use of vulgar language and obscenity has been a charge against Mulk Raj Anand’s fiction also. Even in British and American literature several writers like D.H.Lawrence and Philip Roth though patently recognized as indecent, have not been discarded for literary studies. Therefore, a study of Shobhaa De’s fiction is not only justified from a literary point of view but also necessary for a critical evaluation.

Another objection against De’s writings has been that she writes popular fiction for the market concerning mass culture. Her fiction, like much other popular fiction, is said to have only temporary mass appeal. The writing is inelegant, trite, workaday, a journalist’s quotation copy, a popular seller’s easy-to-digest mix. Her fiction, according to this point of view, has only specific group of people as the expected readers and concerns a specific history of a particular period related to low culture. The critics who reject De’s fiction for being popular fiction fail to understand the fact that popular fiction has its own value. It doesn’t remain limited to specific history of a particular period but forms a dynamic part of the history of that period. Popular fiction articulates the tensions and contradictions within the society giving them popular expression. The literary value of popular fiction cannot be undermined for popular fictions are not some trivial exhibits, waiting to be discovered and mined by historians whose respect for great literature...
persuade them that they should leave the task of re-reading the traditional texts to their literary colleagues: they too have specific formal structures which need careful analysis.(19)
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