Literary Contribution of Shashi Deshpande:

Shashi Deshpande has been a very serious Indian English woman novelist who has depicted different aspects of woman’s life especially the middle-class woman’s life in her short stories as well as novels. Shashi Deshpande has a subjugeate but significant presence in the Indian literary imagination with eight novels, two crime novels, and four books for children, six collections of short stories and numerous articles. She is the recipient of Thirumathi Rangammal prize for her novel *Roots and Shadows* in the year 1984, Sahitya Academy award for the novel *That Long Silence* in the year 1991 and Nanjangud Thirumalamba award for the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in the year 1991. Her novel *Roots and Shadows* have been translated into the French and Dutch languages. The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has been translated into German and Russian Languages. Shashi Deshpande, a highly woman conscious writer substantiates herself the blanket of a vigilant cultural custodian, while presenting a meaningful and creative reinterpretation of myth in *The Inner Rooms*. The characters hanker for self assertion and through protest begin their quest for empowerment. Their protest subsumes the protest of the entire women race against centuries of subjugation and suppression. It is in this sense; they serve as replacement models and achieve their right place in humanity. Shashi Deshpande presents the conflicts of her protagonists without presenting simple solutions. She lets the different choices speak for themselves, the choice to conform or to break free. At the end of the story, Shashi Deshpande says, it is the women themselves who have to exert and come out of the quagmire of patriarchal oppression, to emerge as individuals and as human beings in their own right. Though no writer in India can get away from the idea of social commitment or social responsibility; committed writing has always seemed to me to have dubious literary values. As Sarabjit Sandhu reviews:
The mind and tendency of Shashi Deshpande in a perspective; however, after 25 years of writing, I cannot close my eyes to the fact that my own writing comes out of a deep involvement with the society I live in, especially with women. My novels are about women trying to understand themselves, their history, their roles and their place in this society, and above all their relationships with others. To me, my novels are always explorations; each time in the process of writing, I find myself confronted by discoveries which make me rethink the ideas I started off with. In all my novels, from *Roots and Shadows* to *The Binding Vine*, I have rejected stereotypes and requisitioned the myths which have so shaped the image of women, even the self-image of women, in this country. In a way, through my writing, I have tried to break the long silence of women in our country.¹

The problems and predicaments peculiar to the Indian women found artistic expression in the Indian literature in English since 1970s. In their creative writings, the women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Kamala Das, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and others started discussing openly the sexual problems of women and questioning the gender-role expectations. The female protagonists in their writings evince sufficient force and courage to question the oppressive role of society, religion and culture, but yet they refrain from taking the paths suggested by the western feminists. They rather seek to find their own paths.

It’s an attempt to prove the point that Indian feminism as reflected in the Indian fiction is a unique phenomenon that has to be valued on its own scale and should not be weighed against the scales of the western feminist literature. For this purpose I have attempted a critique of the female
protagonists in three of Shashi Deshpande’s Novels, namely *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence*. In all these novels, Shashi Deshpande objectifies new female subjective experiences with a gynocentric vision. She basically reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her writings, rooted in the culture in which she lives, remain sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences, and they give artistic expression to something that is simple and temporal. Her feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities: tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature. Her art is intensely personal, not political. Her feminism rooted in the native environment tends to be humanistic and optimistic in its outlook.


*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande’s first novel, appears to have grown out of this story. Sarita, the heroine, defies her mother to become a doctor, and defies caste restrictions by marrying the man she loves. Her husband Manu is a failure, and resents the fact that his wife is the primary breadwinner. She uses booze to advance her career, and this further debases her relationship with Manu. Sarita goes to her parental home, but she cannot escape her past so easily. She realizes that her children and her patients need her, and finally reaches certain clarity of thought: “All right, so I’m alone. But so everyone else.”

2. *If I Die Today*: (1982)

The novel, *If I Die Today*, contains elements of detective fiction. The narrator, a young college lecturer, is married to a doctor, and they live on the campus of a big medical college and hospital. The arrival of Guru, a terminal cancer patient, disturbs the lives of the doctors and their families. Old secrets
are revealed, two people murdered, but the tension in the families is resolved after the culprit is unmasked. One of the memorable characters is Mriga, a 14-year-old girl. Her father, Dr. Kulkarni, appears modern and westernized, yet he is seized by the Hindu desire for a son and heir, and never forgives Mriga for not being a son; her mother, too, is a sad, suppressed creature, too weak to give Mriga the support and love a child needs to grow up into a well balanced adult.

3. Roots and Shadows: (1983)

*Roots and Shadows* describe the break-up of a joint family, held together by the money and authority of an old Aunt, a childless widow. When she dies, she leaves her money to the heroine, Indu, a rebel. Indu left home as a teenager to study in the big city, and is now a journalist; she has married the man of her choice. But she realizes that her freedom is illusory; she has exchanged the orthodoxy of the village home for the conventions of the ‘smart young set’ of the city, where material well-being has to be assured by sacrificing principles, if necessary. Indu returns to the house when her great-aunt dies after more than 12 years’ absence. As she attempts to take charge of her legacy, she comes to realize the strength and the resilience of the village women she had previously dismissed as weak.

4. Come Up and Be Dead: (1983)

*Come Up and Be Dead* in this novel Shashi Deshpande demonstrates the versatility of her award winning literary skills. The story deals with the suicide of a schoolgirl in an exclusive school. The head mistress is unable to deal with the situation and especially when it is followed by rumors pointing at her brother. Two more deaths follow, making the school a place of fear and suspicion. After an attempted murder, Devayani, the head mistress cousin and housekeeper, glimpses a conspiracy behind it all. The story is full
of suspense with lots of variety in thoughts. The author made it interesting with wonderful storytelling. This is a unique attempt by Deshpande in English with deep human philosophy.


In *That Long Silence* the narrator Jaya, an upper-middle-class housewife with two teenage children, is forced to take stock of her life when her husband is suspected of fraud. They move into a small flat in a poorer locality of Bombay, giving up their luxurious house. The novel reveals the hollowness of modern Indian life, where success is seen as a convenient arranged marriage to an upwardly mobile husband with the children studying in “good” schools. The repetitiveness and sheer drabness of the life of a woman with material comforts is vividly represented,

> The glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture and curios that had to be kept spotless and dust-free and those clothes, God, all those never-ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again.


*The Binding Vine* is about Urmi, an educated middle-class wife who is grieving over the death of her one-year old daughter Anu and in the process becomes very sensitive towards the sufferings and sorrows of other people as well. Had she not undergone such a personal loss. Perhaps she wouldn’t have had any concern with the others. Thus her narrative comprises three tales, one about herself and the other two about Shakutai’s, a rape-victim’s mother, and Urmi’s mother-in-law, Mira, a victim of marital rape. The novel opens with Urmi grieving over her dead infant daughter who
finds it difficult to let go her memories. For Urmi the loss is terrible and despite the efforts of her friends and family members she clings on to her grief. Although she tries to fight the loss, she feels that for getting this loss would tantamount to betrayal:

Must reject these memories, I have to conquer them.
This is one battle. I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray.⁴

It is her intense attachment to her daughter that becomes the cause of her suffering. Her father death does not shock her much, as she says that her father’s is only “a gentle memory” ⁵ she rejects the idea of having a framed photograph of Anu on the wall: “I don’t need a picture to remember her; I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life” ⁶ When her friend Lalita asks how many children she has, she says, “only one. A son” ⁷ But also gets filled with a sense of guilt as if she was betraying Anu: “How could I, oh God, how could I? That was betrayal, treachery, how could I deny my Anu? …. only one son ….. How could I?” ⁸ S. Indira aptly observes: “she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss” ⁹


A Matter of Time the tale of a woman abandoned by a man. The woman is Sumi, who has three daughters; the man is her husband, a professor named Gopal; and her abandonment forces her to return to the family’s home in Bangalore. The issues Sumi faces are not Indian problems; they are universal ones - not just the difficulties in her marriage, but the conflicts within her family as well.

The novel *Small Remedies* explores the lives of two women, one obsessed with music and the other a passionate believer in communism, who break away from their families to seek fulfillment in public life. Savitribai Indorekar, born into an orthodox Hindu family, elopes with her Muslim lover and accompanist, Ghulaam Saab, to pursue a career in music. Gentle, strong-willed Leela, on the other hand, gives her life to the Party, and to working with the factory workers of Bombay. The narrator of the novel is Madhu, Leela’s niece who travels to Bhavanipur, Savitribai’s home in her last years, to write a biography of Bai, even as a child Madhu had been intrigued by Bai’s relationship with Ghulaam Saab and with Munni, their daughter. Now, grieving the loss of her only son Aditya, Madhu tries to make sense of the lives of these three people, and in doing so, hopes to find a way out of her own despair. As the story unfolds, she goes back and forth in time, drawing out, remembering, and retelling the stories of Leela, Bai, and Munni. And always in the foreground is Madhu’s own story—of a life transformed in one traumatic moment that took away everything she had loved and believed in: her marriage, her son and, very nearly, her sanity. A complex and hard-hitting novel of extraordinary emotional range, *Small Remedies* reaffirm Shashi Deshpande’s standing as one of India’s best writers of fiction.


Shashi Deshpande’s novel *Moving On* is about the secret lives of men and women who love, hate. In *Moving On* Shashi Deshpande explodes the stereotypes of familial bonds with an uncanny insight into the nature of human relationships and an equally unerring eye for detail. A father who delights in the human body its mysteries, its passion, and the knowledge that it contains and conceals. A mother who wields the power of her love
mercilessly, a sister separated in childhood, an uncle who plays games of life and death as a member of the Bombay underworld. A passionate love affair that tears the family apart and a young woman left to make sense of the world and of her own sexuality.


In the Country of Deceit by Shashi Deshpande the main character Devayani chooses to live alone in the small town of Rajnur after her parents’ death, ignoring the gently voiced disapproval of her family and friends. Teaching English, creating a garden and making friends with Rani, a former actress who settles in the town with her husband and three children, Devayani’s life is peaceful, imbued with hardwon independence.

Then she meets Ashok Chinappa, Rajnur’s new District Superintendent of Police, and they fall in love despite the fact that Ashok is much older, married, and—as both painfully acknowledge from the very beginning—it is a relationship without a future. Deshpande’s unflinching gaze tracks the suffering, evasions and lies that overtake those caught in the web of subterfuge. There are no hostages taken In the Country of Deceit; no victors only scarred lives.

I was wading through lament of Mohini by Shreekumar Varma and feeling any book would be a reprieve when I started on In the Country of Deceit. I have to admit that it started off well and then it just tapered off especially towards the end as though the author also lost interest and just was not sure how to end the story. While Varma tries too hard to impress with a convoluted plot marred by stilted language.  

A short summarizing matter to write and to sum up it can be said that the underlying theme in Shashi Deshpande’s novels is human relationships,
especially the ones that exist between father and daughter, husband and wife and also between mother and daughter. In all these relationships the woman occupies the central stage and significantly the narration shifts through her feminine/ feminist consciousness. Her novels reflect the lives of suffocated women in search of a refuge from suffering. Searching for a solution to their private problems, the female protagonists in her novels shift from their personal pains to the sufferings of the other women around.

To Deshpande’s women, relinquishing of roles as daughters, wives, mothers, homemakers and professionals is a very painful process. When the female protagonists start living in their parental homes, they sense a relief in their new/ old shelter. They revert back to their elders’ style of living, giving up the routines to which they got used to in their marital homes. Saru to her chagrin finds herself taking over efficiently all the chores that she administered dutifully day in and out at her marital home. Indu feels a curious sense of freedom and homecoming. She also finds herself resuming the role that her aunt played as the family head. In presuppose new roles or new attitudes towards old roles, they break the mental barriers, which they had initially built around themselves. They learn more about their mothers, and gradually overcome their feelings of alienation, hatred, resentment towards them. In fact they tend to identify themselves with their elderly counterparts and assume the roles of their mothers or mother figures after they return home. With their contempt towards mothers deciphered, they tend to turn inward. Their stay at ancestral homes gives them the chance to recollect the past and re-evaluate their decisions and actions. Their parental homes do not provide them any permanent relief from their suffering. However, these transitory retreats help them to confront their real ‘I’ and understand themselves better. It is here that they explore the sexual and other causes that had led to their marital discords.
Short Stories:-

Collected Stories Volume I was published in the year 2003. Her stories in this collection give a perspective on women in their complex and real relationships. They are about mothers and daughters, grandmothers and wives, women working outside the home, negotiating a balance between tradition and modernity, women analyzing or just expressing their insecurities and fears and desires. There are twenty four stories in this collection.

1. A Liberated Woman:

_A Liberated Woman_ depicts the story of a young woman who falls in love with a man of different caste and marries him in spite of parental opposition. She is intelligent and hard working, and becomes a successful doctor. But her success becomes a victim to unreasonable anger and jealousy. However hard she wades through her severe domestic trials and tribulations, she could not grasp and concretize her domestic identity. In her quest for disassemble the gender politics of Men’s earning and women’s earning, she finds a right solution by emerging out as a unique liberated woman. She triumphantly announces that she finds contentment as a liberated woman Shashi Deshpande comments in her essay on telling our own stories. The basic problem is that, myths have not only originated with men, their interpretation has also been in male hands. Simone De Beauvoir in her remarkable work _The Second Sex_ (1986) comments: “Women have no virile myths in which their projects are reflected, they still dream through the dreams of men. God made by males is the gods they worship.”

2. The Legacy:

Shashi Deshpande’s first book was _The Legacy_, a collection of short stories, and since then she has published dozens of stories. The authentic
recreation of India, the outstanding feature of her stories, is a distinct feature of her novels also. There is nothing sensational or exotic about her India—no Maharajahs or snake charmers. She does not write about the grinding poverty of the Indian masses; she describes another kind of deprivation—emotional. The woman deprived of love, understanding, and companionship is the center of her work. She shows how traditional Indian society is biased against woman, but she recognizes that it is very often women who oppress their sisters, though their values are the result of centuries of indoctrination.

Shashi Deshpande in her works defines freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian Socio-cultural value system and institutions. G.S. Amur rightly comments in his preface to The Legacy:

Woman’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her stories.¹²

The Inner Rooms re-narrates the story of Amba already narrated in The Mahabharatha. Shashi Deshpande delineates the same story in one of her earlier collections of short stories; It was Dark (1986) The Inner Rooms depicts the plight of Amba and her two sisters Ambika and Ambalika. The inner rooms are deemed to be the right place for these women. The abduction of these three sisters by authoritative Bhishma foregrounds the principle of patriarchal authority.

The rules of the game are formulated by the mighty man Bhishma to overpower Amba’s world. But Amba, unlike her sisters, understands the game plan of Bhishma. Amba seeks vengeance against Bhishma for having captured her and ruined her choice of life with her betrothed, the king of Saubha. She declines to marry Vichitravirya. The puny stature of
Vichitravirya and Bhishma’s terrible vow of celibacy do not allow her to find her destiny in Hastinapur. Spurned from all sides and not finding any solution to her bizarre predicament, Amba seeks to immolate herself. Death alone could bring solace to her. Amba has to sacrifice herself in order to wreak her vengeance. Shashi Deshpande shares her experience:

I saw her (Amba) an angry, unhappy, frustrated woman, being carried in her palanquin, going from one man to another. The picture haunted me and I could almost hear this woman saying to me urgently? Write about me, write my story which I did a story entitled The Inner Rooms.  

Shashi Deshpande brings out powerfully the psychological problem of a career woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. The story also transcends feminist constraints and raises issues which the human beings in general encounter in their lives. Shashi Deshpande says that woman should assert herself so that she can overcome or thrash all the suppressing forces. The young woman represents the middle class working woman in modern India. She rebels against the traditions but ultimately tries to grasp a compromise with the existing reality. In this way her liberation helps her to dismantle the gender politics.

The stories are for the most part woman-centered, women in their different roles of daughter, mother and wife, who find themselves enclosed in a tradition-bound male-oriented society and who inevitably suffer from loneliness and a sense of guilt and failure. Shashi Deshpande does not define herself as a feminist writer. And she has no intention of becoming the spokeswoman of the predicament of the middle-class Indian woman. Her novels and short-stories portray social reality the way it is, without any explicit critical claim on the way it ought to be. Only three of the stories have a mythical background, with characters taken from the great Hindu
epic, the Mahabharata. The other sixteen portray common everyday situations a Hindu woman has to deal with in a society that strictly predefined her roles. All the female characters share a deep feeling of isolation and frustration. However, none of them will put in danger the stability of family unity. Being an obedient daughter, a devoted wife and a caring and loving mother are the three ideals of womanhood in Hindu society.

Deshpande’s women are fully conscious of the process of self-effacement behind the figure of the husband and this may lead them to an anguishing desire not to be forgotten, not to vanish into nothing after death. The role of mother can also be rife with conflicts and problems that are not too different from those of any Western woman. Deshpande portrays mothers who, due to a strong feeling of self-devaluation, consider themselves intruders in their own family and strangers to their own daughters others who have to face up to the fact of their daughter’s are being raped, which stirs in them the memory of their own wedding night it as dark.

The writer also touches on the psychological burden with which women who decide to have an abortion have to cope; the conflictive feelings between their sense of guilt, on the one hand, and their affirmation of their right to their body on the other. Mothers are perceived as warning signals by their daughters, who will try to break away from their model. Sporadically, the author shifts to the male of view, promising about the exchange of roles in the seduction game; the boy is left wondering if the dull looking girl has been seduced or she has actually been the seducer. Being a widow in India involves not only a painful personal loss but also a loss of social status. Their sheer becomes more restricted and they are supposed to devote the rest
of their lives to mourn the memory of their dead husbands. Deshpande approaches the problems of widowhood from different ends.

The author does not intend to suggest any solutions. She prefers to act like a camera, recording emotions and situations with realism and sensitivity. The picture shows the fact that tradition is deeply ingrained in society and for those women who have a mind of their own and a clear perception of the disadvantages of their position, one way to come to terms with the surrounding reality is the acceptance of loneliness as a factual part of their existent.

**Literary Contribution of Shobha De:**

Shobha De is one of the most widely read Indian novelists writing in English. Her novels delineate the awakening of woman’s consciousness which impels her to strive for self-actualization. This awakened consciousness of woman stands for the human efforts to be a whole human being her novels raise a voice of protest against male dominance and reject the traditional value system of Indian society. In her novels feminism, in terms of women’s struggles against patriarchy, does not take a political stance. Apart from the feminist consideration Shobha De’s novels express her awareness of the cumulative pressure of social experience in fact she raises her voice against the constructive conditions of the socio-economic environment that stifle a person if he/she refuses to conform to its system of values. The major characters in De’s novels are highly sensitive women who are aware of the absurdity of life that threatens their individuality and thwarts their desire for freedom those educated modern women emerge from a male dominated middle class society with conservative values. They are also conscious of their individuality and their desire to live their lives according to their own values. The clash between prevailing socio-cultural values and their own values system brings out their struggle for realizing
their potential. They actualize themselves by fulfilling the different needs and this finally leads them to the sovereign purpose of life—self-actualization. As a feminist, she knows the problems of women due to her sense of observation. The gender difference has already become clear to her just after birth. However she wanted to be active, dynamic, frank and assertive so as to prove her work and talent. Her columns had already established her worth. Since she had worked for the magazines for a long time, she knew the power of words.

Shobha De’s novels have emphasized the value of equivalence power. Whenever this balance collapses, there is tension in society and double-dealing and hypocrisy predominate. The novelist can easily visualize a change in this respect taking place in the contemporary society, but men, she says, “Are not willing to accept it and many men expressed their anxiety over the changed power equation.”


Socialite Evenings is Shobha De’s first novel. It describes a backdrop of Bombay high society and the lives of bored, rich housewives trapped in loveless marriages and engaging 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 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 and eventually uses her newfound prominence as a celebrity to get
herself a position as an advertising copywriter and creator of a television series. Shobha De’s own rise to fame and some consider it to be partially autobiographical. She later explained:

Basically I wanted to get out of the closed, boring middle class environment of my family. I wasn’t interested in studies. I wanted to be on my own, independent. To see the world, meet people, buy lovely clothes and perfumes. What else does a pretty girl at that age want anyway?²¹


*Starry Nights* was Shobha De’s second novel. The novel is about that the portrayal of Aasha Rani and her lover Akshay was based on the real life love-affairs of Amitabh Bachchan with Rekha Ganesan and Dharmendra Singh Deol with Hema Malini. The protagonist of the book is Aasha Rani, a dark, chubby girl from Madras who has striven for seven years to become a famous Bollywood starlet. Her mother, Amma, has pushed her to attain this status by selling herself into the world of blue films before she was twelve years old, and when she was fifteen to Kishenbhai, a once-famous producer who was encouraged by Amma to take her as a lover in exchange for a film role. Kishenbhai, unable to secure a role for her any other way, finances a film with his own money after promoting her as the newest Bollywood starlet and having her sleep with the appropriate people to secure her attention and renaming her from Viji to Aasha Rani. He then proceeds to fall madly in love with her, who abandons him as she strives to get ahead in the filmy world, fully aware that she was just being used by him at first and is thus unable to return the affection of the older man.

She falls in love with Akshay Arora, a famous Bollywood sex symbol who stars in a string of hits with her. Amma, who had been living with her in
Mumbai, was sent away to Madras by Aasha for objecting to Akshay beating her one day. Eventually Akshay gets bored with her and after his wife confronts her unsuccessfully about her affair with her husband, he reveals to Showbiz magazine that she was a former pornographic actress, and effectively has her blackballed from making further films. When she accosts him at a society party about this, he beats her. Sheth Amrichand, a Member of Parliament and the gangster that controls most of the Mumbai underworld, then takes an interest in Aasha Rani and she becomes his lover and restarts her career under his protection. She then has an affair with Linda, a gossip columnist for Showbiz magazine and Abhijit Mehra, the son of an industrialist, who is about to be married. Linda advises her to go to the south and do an art film, which she does, where she tries to seduce the director only to find that he is impotent. Her interest in her work declines as she continues to obsess over Akshay Arora. She confronts him at a traffic light as their cars are next to each other and their affair is rekindled for a short time. She attempts to get Akshay to marry her, but when it becomes apparent that his interest in her is only due to his flagging stardom and not out of affection for her, she attempts suicide.

Reassured by Aasha Rani’s presence Appa’s dream of power and glory that died long back, takes fresh roots:

But after seeing you again my hopes have been reborn. I can tell myself, all is not lost yet. You have a daughter. A clever daughter, she will do it. She will revive your banner. She will reopen the studio. She will once again restore the lost glory of your name.16


Strange Obsession is about that a woman falling head over heels in love with a woman. In fact Minx is no mysterious woman because she was
the one who gave protection in her house to a new comer Amrita, aspiring to
become a model. I can’t understand how the thoughts of obsession came to
Minx mind and Amrita could know about it from the very beginning. She
should have stayed away from her but on the contrary she enjoyed love
making with Minx in her parents place. The bathroom lovemaking was good
but it could have been more interesting had Shobha De portrayed it between
Amrita and her husband. The shadow of Minx kept on following Amrita
everywhere and she could not get out of it which is just exaggerated. Every
time Minx finds Amrita helpless before her, she experiences sadistic
pleasure which compensates for her own anxiety. This satisfaction and
happiness brings her moments of ecstasy when life appears bliss to her.

Sad! Sad! She (Minx) had said to Amrita running
a finger down her cheek, no savior for you. Too
bad, all your boyfriends are minus balls. No
knight in shining armor. What a pity. You seem
doomed to spend your life trapped with a witch.¹⁷

This novel has been pasteurized into a movie called ‘Girlfriend’ it’s a
good novel but it has shades of fantasy too. When Amrita and her husband
were on a honeymoon they had planned to make an enjoyable trip to a farm
house in a chauffeur driven car and here is an imaginary lovemaking scene.


Sisters by ‘Shobha De is an excellent novel. This is supposed to be
about the rivalry and at the same time emotional bond between two half
sisters namely Mallika and Alisha. They are the daughters of big time
businessman Hiralal who dies at the beginning of the story. Out of the two
sisters one is legitimate and the other one is illegitimate. The story revolves
around the bad world of business in Bombay. The other world that is
unknown to many persons. The novel loses its bearings after some pages,
when Mallika who was introduced as a smart person looking to do well in
her father’s industry is morphed into some kind of a tramp. The story is full of suspense in some parts and it should not be revealed much about this. The novel has an essence of soaps of these days.

_Sisters_ is a book by Shobha De, which is a landmark of her writing. The mindset of two sisters is clearly visible as different from the other and here lies the charisma of the author. The story is illustrating in a beautiful manner. The novel unrolls the story of Mikki and Alisha who represent new woman of India in a new Avtar, with a new identity. The narratives move through many phases of sordidness and joy leading them to experience the moments of self actualization.

The sunlight came pouring into the room through the enormous bay windows of Mikki’s and Alisha’s beautiful home, bathing the two sisters in its golden glow.\(^{18}\)

The dark side of the business world of Mumbai, the tensions between two half sisters Mallika and Alisha and finally the multitudinous twists and turns in relationship weaves the storyline of the Sisters. The story is about the two sisters Alisha and Mallika hence the title rightly justifies the storyline.

5. _Sultry Days: (1994)_

_Sultry Days_ exhibits the gradual move of Nisha and her mother towards maturation. The incidents and experiences of life bring a reassuring draught of self actualization raising them higher than the people around them. The protagonist, Nisha partially actualizes herself through her love for Deb and her love for her parents. But, it is her mother, Mrs. Verma, who shows a complete transformation of personality as she actualizes herself by emerging taller and heavier than her surroundings- the surroundings which have always been antagonistic to her. She stands the test of time with
courage and exhibits a self-confidence which, towards the end of the novel, is reflected by the assertiveness in her voice which was never heard before.

…. The self styled bohemians out to change the world……..The pseudo intellectuals, pariahs and parasites off the rich while spitting on their capitalist values. 19

A novel on Bombay social life although it is a self-proclaimed novel, it may actually be more accurately termed a montage of short stories; it consistently maintained that irresistible combination of lightness of tone and poignancy of spirit, which has resulted in a piece of writing almost unbearably touching. On a sultry, rainy Bombay day Nisha, an impressionable teenager, meets God in the college canteen and falls in love with his ragged, bearded looks and crude, streetwise manners. God patronizingly accepts her into his group and it is in this way that their long and passionate romance begins

God’s driving ambition leads him into the unreal world of pseudo poetry, art for hire and compromised journalism while Nisha lands a job in advertising. Sycophants, court jesters, whores, dirty old men, fixers, pretty boys and party girls drift in and out of their lives and interrupt their romance! As their careers take off with dizzying speed… And then, abruptly and harrowingly, everything about their lives goes wrong.


This book is the collection of versatility 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 colorfully expressed - there is much that is amusing, outrageous, thought-provoking, even shocking.  


* A snapshot is spoken about the women who have decided to refuse to continue with the conventional patterns of sexuality and gender specific roles. *Snapshots* register the reflection of the novelist on the lives of six women, who were friends at Santa Maria High school, as well as on their environment. Each one of them tries to gain control over her environment in her own way. However, their endeavors do not bring a sense of total fulfillment to them. Their obsession with power prevents them from transcending their environment and experiencing the joy of total satisfaction.

Surekha and Reema are representative of average Indian married women who have to bear unfulfilling relationships. Any Indian middle class housewife can identify with Reema in her conjugal experiences.

Her entire body had been tense and respective for whatever it was that would follow - clumsy coupling without arousing or a tender exploration. …… Sex is never discussed – only perpetrated on the other. Like a minor war.  

8. Second Thoughts: (1996)

*Second Thoughts* is a love story about Maya, a pretty girl who is eager to escape her dull, middle-class home in Calcutta for the glamour of Mumbai, where she moves after marriage to Ranjan, a handsome, ambitious man who has an American university degree and a wealthy family background. Maya is determined to be the ideal wife, but finds herself trapped and stifled by the confines of an arranged marriage to a man who,
she discovers, is rigidly conservative and completely indifferent to her desires. She begins to experience the utter loneliness of a stranger in suburban Mumbai. She strikes up a friendship with Nikhil, her charming, college-going neighbor, and the stage is set for an explosive tale of love, betrayal and paths not taken.


Surviving Men by Shobha De this book will be interpreted differently by men and women. A man who wants to know what exactly a woman could think of him, and a woman who wants to know what exactly goes on in a man’s mind. The author being a woman must have analyzed scores of men, before putting down these hard hitting facts but all said and done, it still stands to be her opinion and not the final word on men. Her analyses on men and their money, men and their moms, men in love, all seemed grossly exaggerated in several parts. My own experiences with men, right from college times till today made me saying:

Men always want sex! Men never want to part with their money! All men are terrible in bed! Only Plato knew the meaning of platonic friendships! I agree to some extent, women have been the exploited sex, but in the end it’s the call of a smart woman who should not allow her to be exploited.  

The concept of Raakhi’s brother was rightly scorned at though. In a country like India, the land of Kamasutra and Khajuraho, a woman holding a guy’s hands was enough for the parents’ to scream rape! All actions have a reaction and hence this Raakhi Brother concept started, to give a drape of sanctity to everything that goes on beneath. It’s the society’s hype up of simple acts like holding hands that lead to these falsehoods based associations. A maturing civilization like ours needs to comprehend that two
mature adults have the right to do what they want, as long as they realize their responsibilities.

How to hook and dump a man made an interesting read, and I feel that men will find this really whacky. How to get his interest and then keep silence until he makes the move, how much time to wait before you make your move etc, all strategies explained to perfection! Going through the roller coaster of extreme realities, what men want, what they exactly feel about a woman etc can make you pretty breathless. Any woman who reads this will feel that the man in her life is reasonably good, because De has disparaged, denigrated and defamed man-kind to the limit. I quite did not agree with her on many accounts. Male friends have always stood by me in bad times, lent a patient ear without demanding anything in return, shown more sensitivity, women say male Gynecologists show more concern to their Gym problems than female ones. Both men and women have their own eccentricities, certain traits that are inbuilt, by-default it’s up to us smart people how to make the good to better and the worst into worse- take things in the best possible perspective, and lead a bitching-free life.

10. **Selective Memory: (1998)**

The explosive autobiography of India’s most controversial writer Shobha De, *Selective Memory* is a change in tradition. Shobha 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 finally reveals the true self behind the public persona. Insiders know that besides her commitment to work and the frantic pace of her life, Shobha 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.
Shobha 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.

11. *Speed Post: (1999)*

The relationship between a mother and her children is unquestionably the most special human bond there is. In this book, Shobha De writes a series of letters to her six children on the key concerns of every mother and child in the 21st century family values and tradition; growing pains and adolescent anxieties about love, sex and friendship; religion and God; and the challenge of being a responsible parent. Rich, compassionate, witty and wise, these letters will touch the hearts of readers everywhere.

12. *Spouse: (2005)*

How marriages work and why they fail… Marriage is an adventure, says Shobha De, celebrity writer, devoted wife and mother of six. It’s about trust, companionship, affection and sharing. It’s also about learning to cope with your partner’s moods and eccentricities. Not to mention the delicate balancing act between parents, children, friends and a career, and the sometimes overpowering need to get away from it all. In this delightful book on society’s most debated institution, Shobha De writes about how and why marriages work or don’t. With her usual disregard for rules, she reinvents tradition and challenges old stereotypes, addressing all the issues that are
central to most Indian marriages the Saas-Bahu conundrum the need for honesty, the importance of romance and not any less important, how to recognize the warning signs in a hopeless relationship and run before it’s too late. 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 lifetime.

Shobha De has been many things to many people - her career soared in unexpected ways, starting with her fortuitous entry into the glamorous world of modeling, and moving on to her high-profile years as a magazine editor, before settling as a top best-selling author and one of India’s most widely-read and best-loved columnists. With her vigorous pieces during the 1990s she gave new dimensions to the Indian literary scene. Her thirteen books have topped the charts and have remained perennial favorites with readers. This in itself would be testimony enough, but ultimately her fine work testifies to the courage of the green shrub growing through asphalt. She is undoubtedly one of the best female writers India has ever produced, perhaps not in the same rank as the Man Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy in terms of literary metaphor, but nonetheless more influential in psychological portrayal. Meanwhile, it would not be fair to compare her with the contemporary greats or any other authors - she is unique and deserves her own status.

She writes racy thrillers set in urban India. The erotic content of her novels has been somewhat controversial, with some reviewers being contemptuous of her work, while others suggest that she is challenging the taboos observed by many women writers. Whatever the case may be, the truth is this: she is in large part responsible for the speeding up of the pace and promotion of the sexual revolution in India with her sensuous novels and western outlook.
References:


5. Ibid.,p.27.

6. Ibid.,p.68.

7. Ibid.,p.106.

8. Ibid.,


