Chapter -4

The Technique in
The Works of
Shobha De
A novel conveys what the novelist perceives and comprehends of the world around. In other words, a novel presents the writer's vision of life as it faces him. Through his work, he presents the truth of life as he sees it. In order to do so he has to choose a particular mode so that he can strike a chord of understanding with his readers and make the reading of his work a complete and satisfying experience for them. The method adopted by him to present in the process of living may be described as the narrative technique.

In the post-modern literature the style of a novelist exhibits the interaction and intervention of not only a variety of other works but also of other disciplines. As novel is considered to be the most hybridized form of art, therefore, it naturally tends to be multi-form and polyphonic. In the light of these observations, Shobha De's narrative style is considered to exhibit certain features that show the intermingling of different forms of writings and of different disciplines. The variety of language used by her further enriches her narratives and highlights a highly adaptive orientation in the use of language variants.

In the changed circumstances of the present times a language also does not form a unified whole. The pluralistic nature of social and cultural groups along with the multiplicity of contexts marks the multi-layered nature of language. The interaction of different cultures has resulted in multiple forms of language. Different forms of language are mixed to create meaning in a particular context. The contextual and provisional nature of language informs the multiplicity of meaning also. Instead of representing ultimate or essential meaning, language tends to mark the construction of meaning. According to R.A.Hudson, "Meaning is best studied in relation to culture and thought", and it challenges, "the view which has dominated twentieth-century linguistics that language is both unique and autonomous." All these ideas mark a change in the study of
language; from the study of rules and norms governing a language to the construction of meaning in social and cultural context. The shifting perspective about language has influenced a change in the understanding of narrative style as well.

Apart from the developments that have brought a major change in nature and understanding of art, literature and language, the advent and unprecedented growth of popular art forms has also influenced the narrative style of many recent fiction writers. De's novels exhibit a direct impact of the changed scenario in their subject matter and narrative strategies. Her fiction is rooted in the culture of film journalism and shares certain elements with popular media like television and advertisement. But her fiction writings are not only an isolated example; in fact, they are a part of the new pattern that has emerged in contemporary society. The emergence of a new order of fictionalization has also heavily influenced the fictional devices used by the writers concentrating on it.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to study the role of different narrative strategies and devices employed by De that provide a special significance and add to the artistic worth of her fiction which is otherwise dangerously poised on a much touted pornographic precipice. Her fictional devices introduce subtle twists and ironic turns to the apparently titillating and sensational fictional material in such a way that brings out the serious artistic concerns of the author. In her novels the skilful use of narrator, ambivalent narrative stance, ironic treatment of the subject matter, iconoclastic and demythicising attitude of characters and negative note at the end of the novels form a recurrent pattern. Similarly, the tactics used to maintain the authorial distance, casual but calculated handling of themes, including the treatment of sex, and insertion of useful signposts to mark the serious social concerns provide an
interesting study of De's fictional works. Apart from these elements her fiction's proximity to visual arts, symbolic use of media generated stereotypes and the displacement of reader-writer concord form special features of De's narrative strategies.

Shobha De has often been described as a novelist of romance and realism. She has created a new and entirely original style that takes to the realms of poetic beauty. "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." ²

The depiction of carefully selected characters that correspond with the fictional world forms a significant aspect of De's narrative strategies. As De's fictional world is mainly based on media generated images of the world of showbiz, high society wealthy people, underworld dons, models, strange and striking people moving in romantic, unrealistic surroundings, she creates a corresponding set of characters. Almost all of her characters move like natural inhabitants of a dreamland. Apart from occasional glimpses of their typical looks and strange manners we hardly get any details about their personal lives. De's presentation of the stereotypical characters becomes an effective way to show the nature of the world these people inhabit. Her stereotypical characters lack the quality of being representatives of social beings. As the individuals here do not have any real authentic beings and roots in a particular social background they highlight the fact that the world created by De is based on the images created by media.

The selection of these characters by Shobha De marks the use of mixed language, corresponding with the speech habits of these people. Her pioneering
effort since her Stardust days marks the emergence of a contact language between different categories of people. It shows how the people belonging to different cultural and ethnic groups communicate, transgressing the limits of a standard code. The coming close of the people from different backgrounds, particularly in the film industry and cosmopolitan cities like Bombay, results in the use of a language variant for practical purposes. All these people are not well versed in English or standard Hindi. The wealthy, educated film stars and aristocratic people having public school background can use English as a medium of speech. The 'low class' subordinate staff and minor artists speak Hindi or any other vernacular. Consequently, certain linguistic expressions from their languages gain wide acceptance and become an essential part of the language used by these characters ranging from Hindi words mixed with English and some words directly taken from Hindi. Sometimes Hindi sentences, that have become a feature of these people's speech due to their repeated occurrence, also appear in De's novels. There are numerous examples of such words and expressions like, Abe sale, Chalo chhodo, doodh ke jaisi gori, chidiya, chikna-chikna, hero-log, gulam, chaalu, Arre kya cheez hai, lafdas, apsara, Kamal ki cheez, tambaku paan, yaar, Dekho, Mahurat, chalegi, bindi, Saali randi, rakhail, patni, fida, chakkar, dhanda, filmi, bhabhi, ghazal, kaajal, bhajan, puja, ghar, chai-boy, baby log, Baap re, saab maal milega etc.

De's fictional world presents a heightened interaction between different ethnic and social groups heralding a new society based on mixed culture and high capitalism informing social fragmentation. The language correspondingly marks the destabilization of a standard code and has been referred to as, "a mixture of convent chichi and bazaar Hindi." Here it is pertinent to note that the demolition of boundaries between high and low culture and art in the present age
ascribes a different orientation even to the use of language. The difference between a standard literary language and the language of everyday speech no longer holds ground. In this context, different characters in De’s novels not only use a mixed language—English laced with Hindi—but also make use of Hindi expressions that do not generally go with the sense of sophistication and refinement associated with the language. For example, expressions like, haraamis, chamchagiri, bhadva, saala, chaalu, randi, kya cheeze hai, Kya achcha saala pahad dikhta hai, Kamaal ki cheez not only challenge the concept of piety in language but also contest the hierarchical categorization of language. Consequently, the narrative style comes closer to everyday speech than the form of style traditionally associated with literary writings.

In this context, De’s fictional narratives mark an extensive use of slang and the use of Hindi words and sentences mixed in English. The sprinkling of words from other regional languages like Marathi and Gujarati is also a significant feature of the speech behaviour of the people. These words from regional languages affirm the ethnic features of these characters’ speech—ghatan, bewada, garas, dikra, theplas, mad bauu, medhu, kawala. Similarly, the words changed, deformed and abbreviated like ‘diff’ for difference, ‘info’ instead of information and D.O.M. instead of dirty old man mark the convenience and intimacy of the concerned social group. The natural response, to the use of such kind of idiosyncratic language of common readers of De’s fiction can interestingly be expressed in Maya’s comments about Nikhil’s language in ‘Second Thoughts’:

“Nikhil’s language stumped me. I wasn’t used to his kind of English. I didn’t know what this brand was called. It was a mixture of film dialogues, MTV slang and Hollywood movies. It sounded far too smart
for someone like me, who'd been indoctrinated into using a strictly conventional idiom, the sort of English our teachers in Calcutta expected students in English in England to use – formal, grammatical and somehow lifeless.” (Second Thoughts, p.105)

In spite of an altogether different, unconventional and strikingly variant language used by De's characters we cannot reject it as something imaginary, totally unrealistic and having nothing to do with the social reality of the contemporary life. The language used in De's novels is unmistakably colloquial and startling, but it is reasonably specific, apparently belonging to a particular section of society. It forms a part of the language of the people in the film industry and high class socialite circles. As discussed earlier, the professional compulsions and situational peculiarities of the people's life result in the use of a contact language instead of the accepted standard code. The language found in De's novels may not have become a common phenomenon among the masses yet it forms a part of the speech behaviour of certain sections of society. It gives an indication of the emerging trends among the younger generation of Indian cosmopolitans like Bombay. In this context, Sunil Sethi's comments point out the nature of the social group that tends to use this language, "Ages between 15 and 35, they (Punjabis or Gujarati Yuppies) now constitute a whole urban generation, who say fuck quite easily, probably do it a great deal, but while remaining plugged into the latest foreign videos continue to devour the latest Stardust and Society."4 De's concentration on the life and behaviour of such people also shows how the people under the impact of media have started using a language variant that deviates from the traditionally accepted norms of speech.
The impact of media created images and the lifestyle projected in different popular art forms also finds expression in the practice of frequent code-switching and code-mixing by De's fictional characters. The younger generation fed on media culture, tends to imbibe the lifestyle and speech behaviour presented in popular media. For example, the mixed language used in films, advertisements and on a host of TV channels has found easy acceptance in the media driven society. It gives birth to a language that, "arises only in pieces and out of the disintegration of the existing languages." As the fictional world of Shobha De is set in the cosmopolitan city Bombay the mixing of different languages becomes essential to develop social contact. Apart from this, the multi-linguistic nature of the country also results in the intrusion of vernaculars and pluralistic registers in English. In this context, the exercise of frequent mixing of languages at different levels forms an important aspect of De's narrative style. The examples of mixed language marking cultural fusion can be found in all of De's novels and the readers accept this form of mixed language without raising any eyebrows.

In this context, a particular mention may be made of the taboo words used frequently by the people related to showbiz. They use explicit words and abusive language at regular intervals. The use of taboo words is not limited to English such as 'bitch' 'fuck' 'bastard' etc., but also includes Hindi swear words giving naturalistic expression to these people's speech behaviour like saala, harami, rundi. In the use of taboo words De's narrative style is closer to Anand than to other Indian English writers. The use of unabashed language by women and men alike shows the nature of the world inhabited by these people. The life in this world seems to be governed by practical considerations showing little regard for traditional norms of decency and morality. The characters who use this language can easily be associated with a world free from all social and moral restrictions. It
seems to have become a fashion among these people to use indecent language to show their liberal nature.

Feminist views are all pervasive in Shobha De's fiction in one form or the other in such abundant measure that they are considered to be one of the factors of De's popularity. The exploration of the relevance of the different aspects of feminist concerns as a major narrative device becomes extremely necessary. De's preoccupation with different aspects of woman's life makes her portray a variety of women from extremely modern and liberated to the traditional, subjugated and marginalized. The variety of women depicted in De's novels brings out different ways in which these women are subjected to male hegemony and informs the types of protests registered by these women against patriarchal male domination. An interesting feature of De's portrayal of these women is the presence of subgroups of women, within the main group, that may be highly liberated, oppressive, dominating. They include the modern and the traditional Indian middle-class women who are totally unaware of their marginalization and subordinate position in patriarchy and the ones who express silent protest in spite of their awareness about being oppressed. All the different types of women that appear in De's fiction feel the sting of male cruelty and a deliberately planned scheme of the social institutions of marriage and family to treat them as the 'other.' This highlights the all pervasive nature of male tyranny in the prevailing social system. The images of highly modern and liberated women that find place in De's novels have been used to expose the misplaced views about these women's 'joyful' and 'enjoyable' experiences. The images of the women related to the showbiz place them in the context of high society life that has a charm of its own. The ordinary, middle-class and poor women sometimes, being away from the social context in which these rich socialite women move, falsely consider
them free from the clutches of male oppression. De has very cleverly projected the glamorous images of the attractive, apparently independent and highly professional women trying to dominate the power structures. But the outward glory and glitter of the life these women seem to enjoy is no doubt marked by inherent frustration and disgust as an outcome of their deviant behaviour. The traditional Indian women, in spite of their feeling desperately suffocated and made invisible, try to adjust in the binary paradigm prescribed by male dominated society. These women largely remain limited to the social context related to traditional Indian middle-class families.

The target reader or receiver regarding De's fiction seems to be the people interested in reading popular fiction and those who have a curiosity to have a view of the life and behaviour of the modern rich people, particularly women, in socialite circles. Therefore, the images of women that frequently appear in De's fiction are often related to a section of people of showbiz. In order to cater to the taste of her imagined readers she creates romantic images of women who seem to live in a make-believe world of romance. The signs created to refer to the compatible images of highly modern women leading luxurious, uninhibited and glamorous' life develop into a useful device in different narratives. The women characters that inhabit the fictional world of De's novels are economically independent and free from social and moral restrictions. It provides her an opportunity to include various details about deviant behaviour of women in the fictional narrative. De's female characters, in a bid to acquire power in social relationships and to assert their individuality and separate identity, challenge the traditional notions about the use of language also. These characters assert their right on public speech and indulge in using words and expressions traditionally considered taboo for women.
Certain features of women's behaviour, particularly linguistic habits, presented in Shobha De's novels, mark typical feminine nature of the narrative style. This not only expresses the feminine features of the language used in De's novels but also indicates the presence of an implied female narrator. Therefore, the use of language—though deconstructed, decentralized and freed to a large extent from the traditional categories of language based on essentialist understanding—exhibits certain linguistic features that have the symptoms of typical women's language as explained in Sociolinguistics. The linguistic features mentioned in this regard not only help identify the voice of the fictive narrator but also reveal masculine and feminine aspects of language. Shobha De's use of language not only brings out women's protest against patriarchal culture but also shows man's typical mind-set vis-à-vis woman. In the male dominated society woman is considered to be subordinate to man. Man's assumed sense of superiority makes him treat woman like a commodity. Men in Shobha De's novels rarely show any respect towards their female counterparts. The language they use refer to women reveals their discriminating attitude towards women. Thus De has used language to mirror the hypocrisy, vanity and other such dubious social acts of her phoney characters. Linguistic code switching thus suits her ironical stance and reveals her deeper concern about internal conflicts, individual aspirations, cultural fusion and pragmatic obligations. It becomes a significant aspect of her narrative style.

It can be stated that the most significant narrative elements for the study of De's fiction are the implied author and the implied reader. The implied reader in Shobha De's fiction is reader on the run, a casual reader who is impressed by the make-believe world of visual and print media. A reader who professes to be liberal minded and interested in the new trends but refuses to see his own
hypocrisies and idiosyncrasies exposed. The interest of such a reader is to enjoy the entertaining and interesting spicy material provided in popular fiction. The implied reader here is glamour oriented who desires some moments away from the reality of mundane world. Similarly, pleasure loving, wealthy bored urban housewives, who dream of soap operas induced romances and imagine a life full of charm, excitement and thrill, form the target reader of Shobha De's fiction. The inclusion of different titillating, sensational, entertaining and interesting details in De's novels mark her consideration of the nature of the implied reader. But the real reader is different from the implied reader. He is not beguiled by the apparently charming and delicious fictional details. The real reader can easily see through the novelist's tactics that she employs to make her fiction commercially viable. He can understand the real significance of the fictional structure and see through the artifices of the implied author.

The role of the implied author in Shobha De's fiction enriches the complexity of her novels and helps enhance the fictional appeal of her works. In De's fiction it is the implied author that makes the different details and incidents, presented in the text, coincide with the fictional world. It plays an effective role in depicting the deliciously titillating behaviour of the people while the concerns of the real author remain at a distance. The implied author explores the use of various elements to make the fictional work interesting and having a mass appeal. On the other hand, the intrusion of the real author is noticed in different forms at a different level. It makes De's fiction deceptively simple. This real author/ implied author dichotomy persists even in first person mode of narration. As a result it provides an interesting exercise to trace the real sympathies of the author in her work. Although Shobha De largely hides herself away from the implied author it does not imply that De is altogether absent from her fictional works and she has
nothing to convey to the readers. This complexity of De's fiction makes it
necessary to have a very careful reading of her novels. Thus to understand the
use of different narrative strategies each one of her novels has been taken up
separately.

In 'Socialite Evenings' Shobha De has used first person narrative. The
protagonist cum narrator, in this novel, Karuna, not only talks about the incidents
and the people related to her past life but also expresses their influence on her.
The narrative ends from where it had started. The vivid details about her past life
mark the intensity of her feelings and the nature of her sensitivity that seems to
make her re-live all those experiences once more in her imagination. As the
succession of images crowds her mind the narrator indulges in frequent
digressions to include decisively significant details in the narrative. As a result of
this the narrative involves a number of places and people. The other important
aspect of the narrative discourse related to the past experience is that it provides
the protagonist narrator an opportunity to sprinkle her own comments giving a
judgment about her behaviour at an earlier time. It registers the development of
the protagonist from a teenage middle class girl to a grown up experienced
woman. Karuna's expression of development of her own character marks the
structure of a 'self-begetting novel'. Patricia Waugh describes a self-begetting
novel as an "account usually first person, of the development of a character
to a point at which he is able to take up and compose the novel we have just
finished reading."7

The interaction of different perspectives within the first person narration, in
'Socialite Evenings', makes the fictional discourse complex. The novel has not
been presented from the singular perspective of the aging protagonist only. The
point of view of the young woman protagonist is different from that of the
experienced mature character. For example, as a young glamour oriented girl adopting defiant attitude towards set social norms Karuna says, "**I want to be noticed**" (p. 18). On the other hand, as a mature narrator she has a different opinion about her earlier thoughts. Her critical response to her earlier behaviour is revealed in these words, "**Or perhaps that’s when the madness began to set in**" (p. 19). At another place she again tries to explain her earlier wayward behaviour, "**Today I wonder if I would have gone through all that if Anjali hadn’t been all that I aspired to be. Unlikely. But at that stage in my life she was very special to me as a person.**" (p. 27). The role of the implied author is also significant as the narrator is controlled by the governing consciousness of the implied author. It presents a specific narrative sequence while juxtaposing Karuna’s present with her past. She is known to undergo varied experiences as a result of her attraction for the life and lifestyle that Anjali represents. The implied author shows Karuna’s encounters with a variety of people inhabiting this strange world. It creates an interesting atmosphere to satisfy the curiosity of the implied reader to see the fantastic world inhabited by models, sexual freaks, social prowlers and pseudo-religious personalities. At another level the implied author is being controlled by the real author. Therefore, the perspective of the real author, though difficult to trace in this novel, also remains present. It marks the real significance of all the descriptions, details and other fictional material present in the novel.

As the fictional purpose of the implied author is to meet the demand of the reader the stereotypification of characters becomes an important narrative device to exploit the public taste for popular romantic images of the life and lifestyle of richie-rich socialites. The typical traits often associated with these people provide the author with an opportunity to explore the frivolous sexual concerns and
materialistic priorities of these people including wealthy models and modern women like Anjali, Si, Ritu etc. Similarly, there are typical religious characters like Babaji and Mataji who form the stereotypes of traditional Indian religious heads. The presence of such people in the fictional world shows how the rich people adopt religion as a fashion otherwise their movements remain limited to clubs, parties and business meetings. In 'Socialite Evenings' the stereotypical images of these people correspond with similar characters who often appear in Indian Hindi films. The creation of such stereotypes forms the part of a larger design that tends to make the novel popular.

The presentation of deconstructed cultural stereotypes forms another narrative device in 'Socialite Evenings.' Under the guise of the images of modern, emancipated women the author is able to portray attitudes and situations, which present man-woman relationship in a strange perspective that may upset even our extended notions about such characters. There are women like Karuna, Anjali, Ritu and Si who not only use alarmingly explicit and daring language but also exhibit behaviour that goes far beyond the stereotypical image of such women. For example, the conversation between Karuna and Ritu goes like this:

“What do you do with yourself these days”?

‘Procure’

‘What!?’

‘That’s right. Organize virgins for him (her husband) and his friends. It’s a full-time occupation” (p. 220)

A strange aspect of marriage is revealed when Karuna’s husband comes to tell her about his misplaced doubts about the child that he had earlier considered to be that of Krish. He tells Karuna:
"I have to confess something to you. I really feel very small saying this—but I discovered it couldn't possibly have been his'. 'Because he had himself tied up years ago. Soon after he and Rini got married. It was a part of the deal. He told me so himself." (p. 264)

Similarly, a traditional reader is shocked to see another extreme of the image of a modern liberated woman when Karuna tells her husband:

Let's go on with the story. I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him—in Venice. There is a good chance that I will feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. May be he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant me.... Treat this as a short – term mania that will wear itself out – and then we can go back to business as usual. (p. 186)

The depiction of such views and uninhibited behaviour of different characters has an enchanting impact on the readers. It also shows various possibilities of women's existence in a different world order. We also find certain aphoristic statements which carry startling views and have the potential to shock the readers to attention, "Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about" (p. 68). "Men just feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient women." (p. 69). "Men, like 'dogs, could be conditioned through reward and punishment" (p. 87). "Divorce isn't such a dirty word anymore." (p. 173). Apart from the insertion of aphoristic statements, her repeated reference to women's activities related to their interest in cosmetics and efforts to look gorgeous mark the style of women's gossip magazines. Shobha De's association with such journals as an editor seems to have impacted her style in her fiction also. For example, Ritu's getting ready before going to a party has been described in detail:
“She loved to watch herself dressing. She would lavish at least an hour- and a half before a party going through the whole routine— a leisurely performed bath, may be a shampoo, a face scrub with some important grains, feet and hands scrub with a pumice stone, a good rub with a fluffy towel, deodorant, perfume and then the short but effective makeup routine.” (p. 109)

De’s association with popular periodicals and her skill as a journalist afford her easy access to journalistic style. It brings her narratives close to visual art forms like films.

In ‘Socialite Evenings’ the presentation of different aspects of women’s existence in the modern society brings out the difference between the implied author and the real author. The implied author does not seem to express any social concerns. The objective details about the activities and behaviour of different characters in the novel tend to present these people as they are, without bothering about the moral and social implications of their behaviour. On the other hand, the real author’s genuine concerns can be traced from the presence of useful markers within the text. For example, Karuna shows disregard for social traditions and moral values in her search for a viable identity. In spite of her indulgence in sexually enjoyable, uninhibited life in the name of modernity and women’s liberation she feels, “I wonder if I wouldn’t have been happier if I had lived the way Mother did” (p. 12). A powerful signal is carried in Karuna’s regret and sense of guilt after her abortion. Similarly, Anjali’s turning to religion and Ritu’s going back to her husband can be seen as significant indicators of the social concerns of the novelist. In this novel, De has expressed her concerns through the insertion and dispersion of different signs. She has placed these elements in such a way that their real import becomes difficult to trace.
The narrative strategies in 'Socialite Evenings' make the structure of the novel compatible with the fictional discourse. The implied author having casual concerns provides titillating and spicy details to meet the demands of the implied, casual reader. Despite all this, we can have some signposts where the real author also shows her presence. The achievement of the novelist lies in the way she has fused the serious with the profane and the commercial with the artistic. The fictional presentation serves the interests of the casual, non-serious reader looking for genuine artistic concerns.

The story line of Shobha De's second novel 'Starry Nights', expresses the traditional search for identity and meaningful relationships in a cruel, crass commercial and loveless world. De's presentation of her serious artistic concerns in a subtle and ironical way not only makes her novel interesting but also expresses her artistic achievement while giving her thoughts a popular expression. The author's main concern in 'Starry Nights' is to expose the hollow and deceptively glittering nature of the film world. She concentrates on creating a world having outward grandeur, glamour and attraction that allures ordinary people. In order to make fictional narrative effective and interesting the narrator attempts to describe persons, places and activities associated with showbiz. The different nature of the things described corresponds with the image of the world of showbiz. The different aspects of this world of romance have been presented through the protagonist's initiation, success and ultimate frustration in this world. The different details and the narrative devices employed in this novel seem to be directed to achieve the purpose mentioned in these words of the novelist herself expressed in one of her prose works, "The grim and grit of the movie world was represented in all its squalor, but so was my own contempt, which
came through clearly in the narrative. I made no attempt to hide it. Every bit of the revulsion I'd always harboured against the film industry poured out on the pages- it was a dirty business I was dealing with and I had no desire to sanitize it." In order to achieve the purpose, De creates a suitable fictional framework to bring out the multi-faceted reality of this world. In order to make the precise nature of the fictional work clear to her readers, De has appropriately entitled her novel 'Starry Nights'. The title itself carries an interesting offer to the readers of the popular fiction in catchy, attractive terms.

In order to make the fictional presentation effective and artistic Shobha De has employed third person anonymous narrator who is situated outside the narrative. The narrator provides authenticity to the narration by using shifting point of view. The different experiences and incidents have been presented from the perspective of different characters inhabiting the fictional world. For example, Aasha Rani's early life and experiences in the film industry have been expressed from Kishenbhai's point of view. The narrator reports how Kishenbhai is reminded of his encounter with Aasha Rani and her mother Geetha Devi. The use of multiple perspectives provides ample scope to the narrator for the depiction of romantic, fantastic and unrealistic incidents taking place at strange locations. In this context, Aasha Rani's sexual encounters with a variety of men have been presented through her own perspective. For example: "Looking back on that night, Aasha Rani would conclude it wasn't all that bad. Surma eyes could have been a lot worse. Besides, he’d had quite a bit to drink. She’d always heard that drunks gave women a hard time." (p. 27)

Apart from presenting different perspectives the narrator also serves the purpose of the implied author. The interests of the implied author, in this context, can be traced in the presentation of objective details and descriptions of the
gilded world. Serving the concerns of the implied readers the implied author creates different images and organizes different incidents that provide a picture of the dreamland. The implied reader is taken to different places related to the fairyland where strikingly different and sensational events take place. The implied reader is provided an opportunity to move around in this world of his dreams. Interestingly, the implied author also seems to address the real reader when the concerns of the real author seem to be expressed in the details provided by the implied author. For example, the details about sexual union that bring out its mechanical and lack lustre nature reveal the real author’s views about the degeneration informing the world of the film industry. The clinical descriptions and naturalistic details about the sex act, provided by the implied author, become significant for the real readers also as they carry the real author’s perspective showing the ugly aspect of life in this world.

Another narrative device in ‘Starry Nights’ is the inclusion of explicit sex details of the heroine Aasha Rani with a variety of men. These details provide spicy, titillating reading to the reader. The impressive though unrealistic, startling and strange locations, where Aasha Rani undergoes sexual experiences, create an attractive and fantastic picture of this world. The experimental sexual behaviour of the people like Seth Amirchand, Akshay Arora and other such people inhabiting this world take the readers to an imaginary world of their dreams. The naturalistic and photographic details provide the readers an opportunity to live their fantasies of such experiences. The bizarre sexual activities of these people and the use of taboo words by men and women alike provide sensational and thrilling reading. It is a different matter that these details are directed to expose the disgusting and mechanical nature of sex act:
He'd grabbed her shoulders and had begun thrusting himself brusquely against her. Aasha Rani had thought, "This is it. The worst is now over. The beast will spill, get off and leave me alone in peace." (p. 28)

The description of these people's sexual behaviour also brings out the exploitation of women in the industry. There are men like Kishenbhai always prowling for easy preys. Their attitude towards women has been expressed in the following words, "But his point was simple, if it hadn't been him, it would have been someone else. The industry was full of bhookas, sex-starved men who had chidiyas like Aasha Rani for breakfast" (p. 14) Similarly, Aasha Rani's words express her position in this world of business and commerce where sponsors like Abhijit come to her for sexual pleasure only, "You are a married man with a lovely young wife. And yet, you come to me. Why? For sex. Nothing else! What does that make me? I'm just your celebrity—fuck" (p.97)

De's conversational style and racy narration forms an effective fictional device in 'Starry Nights'. It maintains the interest of the reader as it provides a quick reading and keeps the reader engrossed in the fictional discourse. As there is not much of a complex fabric of story or any complicated plot, the racy narration adds dramatic qualities to the narrative. The interest lies in the pace of the narration that keeps on shifting from one situation to the other involving a variety of incidents and experiences. A casual reader enjoys speedy, superficial reading that provides entertainment. The conversational way of presentation also adds to the pace of the narration. For example, Amma expresses her resentment in breathless, though short, sentences:
"How dare you accuse Baby of all these things? From where do you get the guts? You filthy rapist. Are you a saint yourself? Haven't you also enjoyed my daughter, exploited her? And now you want explanations? Confessions? What have you done for us besides making that two-bit film?" (p. 13)

Apart from conversational style De has cleverly used minute details about different things related to the films that bring them alive to the readers. The setting about rich luxurious lifestyle has been described in these words:

"The set had represented a deluxe-luxury room. The Indian filmmaker's idea of how the rich lived and lolled. Aasha Rani had thought it was the most gorgeous room she'd ever seen. Velvet bed spread, brocade curtains, Rexine love-seats, pink telephones, gilt-edged mirrors and a fountain!" (p. 22)

These descriptions correspond with the image of wealthy lifestyle projected in films. Another scenic description provides a glimpse of the activities taking place in the industry:

"Aasha Rani had gone into the tacky room which had been cleared of furniture. An ugly, synthetic fur rug had been spread on the floor. Four extremely bright, harsh lights were focused on it. The cameraman had positioned himself by the door. The director was sitting on a stool, fanning himself and chewing paan." (p. 53)

These scenic descriptions provide an inside view of the film world to the readers. It marks De's understanding of the public mind that is curious to know about the things going on behind the scenes. The inclusion of these elements serves the purpose of the material that the readers often find in glossy
magazines. At the same time these elements tend to bring out the reality concealed behind the dazzling world depicted in films.

In this novel Shobha De’s narrative strategies also include the elements generally found in super hit Hindi-formula films with calculated doses of romance, suspense, stunts, unnatural and strange locales, sex and violence. Using the cinematic method of focusing the camera on different events and characters, showing romantic surroundings and manipulating the element of coincidence, De fictionalizes her subject matter just like a film. With each chapter the narrative shifts from one character to the other expressing a variety of experiences. She uses flashback and shifting point of view to provide a cinematic design to the novel. The uncommon surroundings of the celluloid world, where Aasha Rani meets people like Kishenbhai, film producers, financiers and mysterious personalities like Amir Chand, provide romantic locale to the novel. The variety of descriptions of Aasha Rani’s sexual encounters with a number of men and their startling sexual behaviour provides spicy material used in popular commercial films. The ups and downs in Aasha Rani’s life, the complications of her affairs with a married film star Akshay and her rise and fall in film industry develop the necessary atmosphere of suspense.

De’s choice of characters also suits her fictional design in ‘Starry Nights’. The fictional world of the novel is inhabited by film personalities and the people associated with showbiz. The presentation of typical film personalities like Aasha Rani, Akshay Arora, Kishenbhai etc. and underworld dons like Seth Amir Chand, who have great influence on the affairs of the industry, is based on the media generated images of these people. The descriptions of these characters correspond with their stereotypical images created by media. Their typical behaviour, the frank, unabashed language they use, their circle of friends and
their surroundings all create a romantic picture of the world of films. Different characters use the language according to their social status and professional requirements. An interesting example of her language can be observed in 'English laced with Hindi,' as used by a professional in the film world:

"Myself Kishenbhai, producer, actually speaking, assistant producer. Madamji, I'm on look-out for new talent. Actually I'm knowing everybody.... All big-big producers, hero log, heroines, everybody.... South Indian girls are good. No khit-pit, no faltu nakhras." (p.7)

An important aspect of De's narrative strategies that marks her calculated handling of the fictional material in this novel is the manipulation of the reader's response. She exploits the response of the readers with a skilful arrangement of different incidents, descriptions, experiences and responses of different characters that unfold on the pattern of a Bollywood commercial movie. In most of these films the audiences are shown sensual, sensational, glamorous, attractive and alluring aspects of life led by criminals, corrupt leaders, smugglers and people involved in illegal activities. It is only in the last part of a film that the genuine concern or the sense of poetic justice is conveyed through the death, imprisonment or regretful behaviour of these characters. In 'Starry Nights', we find Aasha Rani involved in unethical activities and immoral sexual behaviour to achieve success in the industry. She does not express any sense of regret or a moral dilemma throughout her experience in the dirty world of film industry. Occasionally, there are oblique warnings that appear in the form of advice from Aasha Rani's mother or the pitiable condition of earlier film heroines like her. But she remains indifferent to all this. It is in the second part of the novel that Aasha Rani expresses her frustration with this unreal world that exploited her. Her contempt of this world comes out when she says, "I hate him (Kishenbhai) for
getting me into the industry, for ruining my life. I will never forgive him, never. Now take me home. I want to go home!" (p. 113)

The depiction of Aasha Rani's rags to riches story corresponds with the archetypal pattern of rise and fall in human life. The reader easily understands and recognizes the images created to show the life and experience of the protagonist. The division of the novel in two parts marks De's conscious effort to provide a structure to the novel that matches with the pattern of rise and fall of Aasha Rani in the film industry. The first part of the novel mainly concentrates on Aasha Rani's initiation, survival and success in the film industry. The second part begins with her frustration and impending failure in the film world. On the very first page of this part she expresses her frustration and disgust with the industry. She no longer seems interested in her career. She goes to New Zealand and gets married to James Phillips. Her unsuccessful marriage and her experience with Gopalkrishnan, that endangers her life, bring a great change in her. She ultimately decides to live with her daughter and revive the old studio of her father. Thus the novel ends on an optimistic note.

Despite the blatant criticism it has to be admitted that the novel reveals the realistic picture of hypocrisy, degenerated values, double standards both of the filmi people and also the celebrities who come from a higher social strata and are successful to hide their real personalities with money and power. Shobha De's bold and transparent language with which she portrays the intensity of grief of a tormented, discarded and anguished soul saves her writing from being a mere pornography and establishes it as a further extension of feminism and a protest against the established patriarchal order of the society.

Shobha De's third novel 'Sisters' is set in the corrupt glitzy world of big business houses and industrial quarrels to control the wealth. The novel is related
to the life of two rich socialite sisters involved in bitter rivalry that seems unending. But the main concern of the novelist in 'Sisters' is to demonstrate the frantic efforts made by Mikky, a modern educated socialite young woman, to win some space in the society that is otherwise hostile and inhospitable towards women. The recurring theme of woman's self-assertion and search for viable human relationships and lasting happiness forms the broad framework developed in the novel with the help of different fictional devices. The theme in this novel functions as a binding force and works as a major narrative device that helps in developing corresponding set of characters, setting and compatible world view of the people inhabiting the fictional world.

A significant narrative device that makes the fictional presentation artistic and interesting in 'Sisters' is the creation of a suitable setting for the fictional incidents to take place. The novelist provides descriptions and details of the places that develop a glossy and fantastic picture of this world of opulence, wealth and romance inhabited by business tycoons, aristocratic young girls, energetic, handsome young men and cunning schemers. The lavish and luxurious tastes of successful industrialists and businessmen, social prowlers, their way of life and behaviour shown in 'Sisters' correspond with the image of such people found in Bollywood films and the details about their life often projected in visual and print media. A glimpse of such splendid and gorgeous surroundings has been provided in the following details about Seth Hiralal's office, "Hiralal's 'suite' stretched over five thousand square feet of highly polished granite. His table, a massive slab of Italian marble, was as big as a room itself." (p. 17). Similarly, the quality goods these people use, like Persian carpets, French Chandeliers, Italian marble, English carriage clocks, Jamevar shawls, Oak-wood cupboards, Van Cleef and Arpel's diamond earrings etc. create a smashing image
of their way of life. Moreover, the clubs they visit are favoured by richie-rich kids of industrialists, starlets, 'social prowlers'. All these details have a mesmerizing impact on the readers. They unfold like a film scene depicting the lifestyle of wealthy men.

The structure of the novel also corresponds with that of a Bollywood film. The activities and behaviour of different characters, various happenings and the scenic depiction of the life presented in this novel unfold like an action-packed thrilling drama. The presentation of the fictional incidents, characters and their surroundings seem to be manufactured like a film-script. The novel opens with a significant situation developed with the help of minute details. The young, beautiful and wealthy daughter of Seth Hiralal has arrived from U.S.A. after hearing the news of the death of her parents in an air crash. The story gains pace with the coming of another character Alisha on the scene. She is the illegitimate daughter of Seth Hiralal. The drama of their rivalry starts. The presentation of Mikky's movement in clubs, her sexual escapades with Navin and Binny Malhotra add sensational and romantic elements to the fast moving plot of the novel. The story moves like a film sequence. The mystery surrounding Seth Hiralal's death develops the atmosphere of a detective tale. Chance plays its role in the death of Binny Malhotra and his wife and children. Mikky's receiving anonymous calls at this stage introduces a much needed element of suspense in a film. And as it happens in the last scene of Bollywood commercial film the mystery is resolved and the film stunt action takes place that ends with the arrival of the police on the scene, as usual, when the villains or the culprits have been apprehended and are under control. Ramanbhai plays the role of a villain, subordinated by a hired killer Bahadur Singh referred to as a 'death machine'. Bahadur Singh's seeking
revenge for his wife's rape by Seth Hiralal adds sensational elements and the epilogue provides the happy ending.

Apart from providing the novel the construction of a film the implied author has made abundant use of startling, fantastic, explicit, titillating details with a view to meet the demand of the implied reader. These details not only reveal the shady, promiscuous life of the rich people having fabulous tastes but also make the novel appealing and deliciously readable due to its soft-porn appeal. the naturalistic, photographic details about the sex act solicit the comment, from New York Times, "Ms De shocks India, and much of its literary set like no other writer today." The following passages from 'Sisters' have the potential to shock the traditional reader:

"The moon was low in the sky and had a rainbow halo around it, Binny gestured towards it, 'A good omen. An auspicious one', he said, as he took Mikki into his arms and kissed her gently at first, and then with increasing passion. She felt her heart thudding against his chest. Slowly, he unbuttoned her shirt and cupped her breasts. Mikki caught her breath as Binny hauled her on to the bed and nearly tore off her clothes. He kept repeating, 'Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful', while she lay back and closed her eyes. At that moment the only thing mattered was the feel of him over her slim body, the touch of his fingers inside her, and the slow, deliberate movement of his tongue as it explored her mouth and kept up a steady rhythm, while his legs parted hers and began his final assault on the woman he has already claimed as his own." (p. 87)
Many more passages could be cited to show how the description of consummation of love and sex almost borders on obscenity and pornography. But Shobha De’s language is not without its merit. Occasional flashes of poetic language can be seen in the novel. The best passage in the book which almost brings to our mind the famous description of the touching scene of the Queen’s death by Lytton Strachey in his book ‘Queen Victoria,’ is Mikki’s reaction to Binny’s death and funeral. It is one of the best passages ever written by any Indian English novelist of our time. Mikki slowly begins to realize life as if she sees it in a mirror and with controlled passion and subdued grief she feels the power of love that wins always. Shobha De writes:

“Mikki couldn’t wait to get out of that place. She was booked on the evening flight. As she looked at the largest coffin, she imagined Binny lying inside with a sneer on his face, laughing at the grotesquerie of life, laughing at her. She suppressed the desire to join in his laughter. She thought of happier times and her expression automatically softened. Suddenly it dawned on her that she didn’t resent anything about him at all. Not even his brutality towards her. Perhaps that’s why they call ‘true love,’ she thought wryly, a soft smile on her face. She looked at the other coffins and found herself feeling strangely happy for Urmie and her children. They were all together at last. Something they couldn’t be when they were alive. Mikki shut her eyes and fell into a light reverie induced by the heady smell of spider lilies, roses and incense combined with the insistent beat of tiny cymbals as the priest droned on.... Mikki had a beautiful vision of Binny, dressed in his sharpest suit, ascending heavenwards, floating up like he was in a gently rising hot-air balloon.
He was acknowledging the crowd gathered for his funeral with a jaunty wave of his hand, his lips twisted... she thought she saw his family—his real family—Urmil and her kids, floating happily around him, also waving and showering flower petals on everybody. Mikki felt a few descend on her shoulder... and then she jerked out of her trance as she realized the coffins were being lifted up and the people had begun throwing rose petals at the departing procession. Mikki watched as the men moved gracefully away, their white kurtas and dhotis standing out starkly against the bright green of the grass. It was just too beautiful. And she was glad for Binny. He would have approved...” (pp. 533-534)

Shobha De’s use of language and creation of new idioms by acclimatizing idioms from Indian languages to English language, adds to the charm of the novel. Her variety of narrative strategies in 'Sisters' makes a simple tale of the rivalry between two sisters interesting and artistic. Her ambivalent narrative stance helps her include different forms of women’s existence, including female sexuality, in the fictional narrative. Her ironical narrative stance, the role of the implied author and the fictive narrator make the novel artistic.

In ‘Strange Obsession’ the selection of a bold theme related to female sexuality becomes an effective narrative strategy. It marks the author’s attempt to dare grapple the socially unacceptable female sexual behaviour. The choice of theme also shows the author’s understanding of the public mind curious to know about the life traditionally kept in the margins. The fictional account of Minx’s startling behaviour and the description of strange and fantastic setting find relevance in the thematic concerns of the novel. It also provides interesting, spicy
and sensational details into the fictional narrative. The narrator gives photographic details about the socially unaccepted sex act:

"Minx removed her clothes one by one and placed them neatly on a chair close to the bed. Amrita was suddenly conscious, very conscious, of Minx's touch as each nerve-ending in her body came alive under her probing fingers and tongue. Minx had taken each one of her toes into her mouth and was massaging them with her tongue, while her hands reached between Amrita's legs and touched her with teasing, rhythmic stabs. She felt her legs open almost voluntarily, as Minx climbed upon her, straddling her slim hips with her own, covering her breasts with her hands, cupping the nipples and circling them repeatedly till they ached with a sweet pain." (p. 94)

Such details, given in explicit language, serve the purpose of the implied author as well as give effective expression to the theme. The third person anonymous narrator provides an objective view of the world created in this novel. The narrator is apparently situated outside the narrative. But the picturesque nature of the narration gives the impression of spatial proximity of the narrator and expresses the narrator's power of imagination. The situation of the third person narrator restricts him from probing the inner-self of the characters. As in the novel we come to know only about Amrita's reaction to the sexual perversity of Minx. Even when the experience of lesbian relationship is described in minute details the innermost feelings and thoughts of Minx remained untraced. Although the third person narrative tries hard to give us an impression of the inner landscape of the character, but the limitations of the third person narrator or the limited perspective do not allow an access to the inner feelings of the character.
The third person narrator seems to concentrate only on the degree of obsession that has a sway over the perverted lesbian character. Therefore, the narration remains limited to the expression of frustration and intensity of Minx's obsession through the description of her shocking and strange behaviour instead of the presentation of the causes, biological or psychological, that result in such disturbing scenes:

"At home the tantrum would continue for a couple of hours, with Minx rushing around the place, punching pillows and sometimes the wall. She had struck Amrita a couple of times- stinging blows across her face- and then collapsed at her feet begging forgiveness, kissing her toes and wetting them with tears." (p. 133)

These descriptions have been used as an effective narrative device to supplement the limited perspective of the third person narrator to give a picture of the disturbed perverted mind.

The narrator, in this novel, presents certain hyper real images of people and their surroundings to give a feel of the reality. The mention of real places in Bombay along with the description of fantastic atmosphere prevailing there appeals to the implied readers. For example, the description of a suburb like Colaba where, "everybody crawled out from by lanes and thronged the Irani cafes notorious for serving more than just their specialties of bun-pao-maska" (pp. 5-6), has been used to create a special impact of reality. In order to make the fictional world more real than the real, the narrator gives extended details of the surroundings and hyper real images of the people inhabiting this world. For example, the people who inhabit this make-believe world include women described in these words:
"Those horrible snooty females who treated her (Amrita) like a villager and spoke in a language she was just about beginning to understand, filled with local slang and affectionate abuse that kept outsiders firmly out of the charmed circle. They dressed differently too, in dresses that resembled bandages and weren’t much bigger. And they smoked too much. Amrita had heard wild stories about their nights on the town.” (p.11)

The novel like De’s earlier novels holds the used cliché situations and stock characters which brings the novel close to the structure of Bollywood films and romantic tales. The sudden meeting between Meenakshi and Amrita seems to be based on similar situations presented in commercial films and fantastic tales. The imaginary romantic situation of the chance meeting between Meenakshi and Amrita has been presented in the following words:

"Meenakshi was buying a pack of imported cigarettes from the paan-wallah in Colaba when she spotted her for the first time. Amrita was getting out of a taxi and rushing into a building across the street...... Meenakshi watched the flustered girl as she made a last minute dash from the road divider. A sharp screech of tyres and she saw Amrita sprawled across the street, her clothes all over the wet, slimy road, as a taxi-driver abused her lustily and the crowds gathered, as if out of nowhere, to watch the impromptu street-show.” (p. 4)

The choice of characters in ‘Strange Obsession’ suits the fictional narrative. The typical character traits of Minx that correspond with her obsessed, perverted behaviour have been presented through her activities, manners and her language. She adopts the language and style typical of man to exercise control
over social power relations. She approaches Amrita and expresses her 'love' for her in a way that befits a man. "I love you. I have to protect you. It's my duty." (p. 36) Meenakshi's use of language is an effort to challenge traditionally ascribed norms for female linguistic behaviour. Of course, Shobha De turns and twists language to suit her needs:

"To Shobha 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."  

'Strange Obsession' appears to be an extraordinary novel in several ways. Shobha De with her novel definitely stands apart with her unique creation where the idea of woman as a free and independent existence is repeatedly getting emphasized.

'Sultry Days' is about the "unreal world of pseudo poetry, art for hire and compromised journalism." The main thrust of the novel is to provide a glimpse of the make-believe world related to showbiz and art. The major part of the novel is surprisingly devoted to the introduction, including brief and catchy descriptions of different characters who overwhelmingly populate the world of the novel. There is very little but sudden and abrupt action in the novel. In order to make the fictional presentation plausible Shobha De uses certain narrative strategies that help create suitable fictional design for the novelization of the life spectacle and the incidents depicting the strange world of art and shady deals of underworld dons.

In 'Sultry Days' the narrator Nisha is an inhabitant of the world she describes. Nisha, governed by the real author, provides glimpses of the world she has observed during her stint in this place for six years. The real author makes the narrator move in this world like an observer and tells about the people and
places she has come across. The narrator then expresses her impression in quick flashes. As a result of this, a number of characters are introduced in the narrative. These characters keep on drifting in and out of this world like a moving collage of images on the screen. The incidents and experiences of these characters form a major part of the narrative. For example, the strange manners, looks and bizarre experiences of characters like Deb, Rakesh, Kawla, Iqbal, Babli, Sujata, Chandini, Chameli, Malini, Padminidevi, Zainab, Billoo and Bhandari, Yashwantbhai, Nitin, Manju, Naval, Raisa, Dharm and Ron give an idea of the nature of life in the unrealistic world of the novel. Instead of giving detailed descriptions of a limited number of characters the narrator provides the strange and peculiar aspects of a variety of characters. The incidents related to these characters include sudden meetings, poetry sessions, sexual encounters, small quarrels, visits to shooting sites, ad agencies and parties.

Due to a large number of characters (around 70) presented in the novel the repertoire of their life and lifestyle is limited in scope. The people inhabiting this world share their tastes, likes and dislikes, views about life and the experiences limited to the showbiz. The narrator also serves the real author's purpose related to the presentation of a section of society consisting of a particular set of people living in the world of their own creation. Therefore, the details of life we get in 'Sultry Days' remain limited to the world of showbiz and the underworld dons having an influence on it.

Another narrative device used in 'Sultry Days' that forms a recurrent pattern in De's earlier novels also, is the inclusion of sensational incidents based on film scenes. In this novel, Deb's involvement with the affairs of the underworld don Yashwantbhai has been presented just like a film scene. Even the narrator is reminded of Hindi films when she encounters a similar situation in the novel, "It
was getting to a stage where life was beginning to imitate a Hindi film. I expected to see Shakti Kapoor in white shoes and gloves, lurking near the house with a snub-nosed pistol" (p. 216). The narrator's comment highlights the fictional nature of the narrative. The inclusion of the details about such incidents provides the novel the structure of a murder-mystery drama. The rise and fall of Deb in this world follows the pattern of rise and fall in human life as presented in 'Starry Nights' also. The repeated use of this narrative strategy shows the influence of films on the author and the narrator's attempt to create a fictional world based on the images depicted in films. It tends to make the fictional presentation far removed from reality. Consequently, the novel becomes a work of pure fiction manufactured on the basis of imaginary world often projected in films.

'Sultry Days', no doubt, is replete with bizarre incidents and overcrowded with characters. These elements cause problems for the development of a well knit plot. However, a close study of the novel reveals a deeper structure that makes this novel a unified whole. The first part that spreads from chapter 1 to 7 is related to the gradual development of the romantic association between God (Deb) and Nisha and the process of God's fall that starts almost at the end of the seventh chapter. In the eighth chapter God's association with underworld don named Yashwant Bhai is revealed to Nisha also. After the eighth chapter God's gradual movement towards his ultimate fate can be observed. The decisive change comes when the incident related to Promila takes place in chapter twelve. A close study of the development of plot in the novel, showing gradual rise of God and his sudden death, brings out an archetypal pattern of rise and fall in human life. On the other hand, the building of a proper atmosphere for the tragedy to take place has its own significance. This brings out the justification and relevance of
the slow pace at which the plot proceeds in ‘Sultry Days’. The protagonist in the novel slowly slips towards a deep and dangerous but attractive and pleasant looking marsh of the illegally collected wealth and power gained through foul means. God’s gradual development from a shabby looking, ill mannered romantic youth into a famous journalist, a worker for a political broker and his consequent death can be studied on the pattern of a tragic play. The rise and fall of the hero, though in this case an anti hero, definitely has a particular appeal for the masses. The presentation of a tragic pattern in life makes the novel artistic and complex. Such a pattern can be pointed out in other novels of De like ‘Starry Nights’ and ‘Strange Obsession’ also, but in ‘Sultry Days’ this pattern has more prominent and emphatic overtones of a tragedy than one can discern in the two novels mentioned earlier.

An important factor that shows a different nature of narrative in ‘Sultry Days’ from her earlier novels can be observed in the shift from the presentation of recurring pattern of the uninhibited and unabashed sexual encounters of extremely rich and modern people to the revelation of the unreal world of pseudo-artists. The central characters in ‘Sultry Days’, unlike Shobha De’s earlier novels, belong to poor and middle class families. The narrator Nisha and her lover Deb are, no doubt, the members of the world they live and act in, yet they mark a specific distance from it. Of course, the world of ‘Sultry Days’ is inhabited by whores, homosexuals, pimps, lesbians, womanizers, pseudo artists, cruel and selfish underworld dons and many such weird personalities, but they operate in the background to bring out the experiences of Nisha and Deb. Another element that marks a change in this novel is that a male for the first time holds the central position. The narrator, no doubt is a woman but she discovers her own self through the male character Deb.
Another aspect of Shobha De's efforts to turn to mainstream writing can be marked in her use of language. In her earlier novels De makes use of a typical 'lingo' of the modern Indian public school educated people. De frequently mixes Hindi words and words and expressions from regional languages with English words without making any effort to make these expressions clear to those readers who do not know Hindi or the regional languages in India. In 'Sultry Days' also we come across a similar use of language, but it is quite restricted and accompanied by a deliberate effort of the novelist to make these expressions clear. For this purpose, some of the sentences in Hindi have been translated. For example, “Baba yeh sab mamla ajeeb hai” (All this is really strange) (p.226), and “Aapki ladki ki jaan khatre mein hai” (Your daughter's life in danger) (p. 216). Apart from this typical use of language 'Sultry Days' shows De's skill to exhibit individual linguistic peculiarities of different characters. In this context, the use of typical language by Kawla, the ad agency man, is noticeable. “That phellow...sorry madam but that phellow is useless” (p. 42). Similarly, Basu's mispronouncing some words has also been pointed out as he pronounces 'laab' instead of 'love' and 'tharsting' instead of 'thirsting'. De's use of a mixed language in this novel seems more concerned with certain characteristics of the speech habits of different people and ethnic groups.

'Sultry Days' in spite of being a typical patented Shobha De product marks certain narrative strategies and concerns that make it slightly different from her earlier novels. This novel encourages De's readers to hope for more serious and artistically rich writing from her.

'Snapshots' depicts the snatched moments out of the lives of six women who were together in their school days. The novel concentrates on the deviant forms of behaviour that different women exhibit to show the various forms of
female sexuality. The novel consists of fourteen chapters divided into subsections. With each chapter the focus shifts from one situation or character to the other. The first chapter concentrates on Aparna's indulgence in promiscuous relationships. The second chapter is about Swati's organizing a party at Reema's house and the preparations that Reema makes for the party. In chapter third a view of Surekha's life of domesticity and her reaction to the invitation has been provided. Chapter four and five depict aspects of Rashmi and Noor's life. In chapter six the stage is set for the get together. From chapter seven onwards the different scenes at the party are revealed and the women collected here share their experiences without any inhibitions. All these chapters are complete in themselves. However, the subsections in these chapters mark the narrative digressions. For example, one section of chapter first gives the details about Aparna's life while the second section of this chapter is about the invitation sent by Swati. Chapter two marks the temporal and spatial shifts in two sections. In the first part Reema is concentrating on the situation arising from Swati's idea of organizing a party at her place. The subsection of this chapter marks a digression telling about Aparna's life with her husband Rohit. In chapter three Surekha gets the invitation and the subsection of this chapter is about her sexual affairs with different men including Pip. The different details about her life give an image of her personality. Similarly, there are certain details about the shooting of a film scene at a brothel. The different chapters provide a montage of snapshots and the subsections function as cross-cuts, contrast cuts and flash back to make the transition from one incident to the other smooth. The transitional device corresponds with the theme and the structure of the narrative built around the party being organized by Swati. In spite of lacking a unified plot, the novel succeeds in creating a unified impact.
As the fictional narrative in 'Snapshots' seems directed to explore unimaginable, surprising, unrealistic and shocking aspects of female sexuality, the deployment of third person omniscient narrator seems to suit the exercise of narration. The narrator not only provides objective details about different women's behaviour, but also expresses their feelings during these experiences. The third person narrative being defaced person provides more vivid, explicit, uninhibited and frank account of these women's experiences, especially their sexual encounters. The narration of these women's intimate experiences in the third person may not have the expected level of authenticity, but the narrator's taking over the responsibility of expressing these situations and experiences saves the women characters embarrassment that they might feel while expressing their experiences themselves. Apart from this, the depiction by the third person narrator serves the concerns of the implied author that tends to make the fictional narrative spicy and spectacular. For example, Aparna's experience with Prem, Raju's sexual affairs with Reema and Noor's incestuous relationship with her own brother have been presented by the narrator. Had the characters themselves narrated their experiences their presentation would not have been objective and most of these characters may not have given minute details as given by the narrator. For example, Reema looks at Raju's 'yellowing black- and-white photograph in her lap and it reminds her of the whole incident. The narrative situation becomes complicated when the narrator expresses these characters' earlier life from the point of view of the characters themselves. As a result of this, the narration does not remain limited to objective expression of facts. The narrator also tends to give a view about these characters' thoughts, feelings and perspective.
An interesting situation arises when the perspective of the narrator gets mixed with that of the character. It tends to express the concern of the real author to offer some idea, explanation or world-view. While expressing Rashmi’s feelings about a particular experience the narrator starts giving comments. These comments are not related to her thoughts, rather they express the narrator’s views about the whole situation:

“She might have, given more time. But then, given time, most people are capable of loving anybody. Especially when there is mutual need, mutual dependency. May be that was it- she didn’t make her men feel needed enough. And consequently they didn’t need her.” (p.49).

A calculated and subtle way of narrating the incidents forms a useful narrative method employed in ‘Snapshots’, that marks the presence of the authorial voice. The narrator seems to present certain happenings, situations and experiences to provide enjoyable reading. But a careful reading of these elements reveals the intrusion of the real author’s perspective that exposes the pain, suffering, shock, regret and disgust concealed behind the apparently charming and pleasure giving exercises. The careful and calculated placement of crucial signals and markers within the sensational, spicy, exciting and deliciously readable material marks the complex nature of narration in ‘Snapshots’. The following details reveal the complex nature of the narrative and indeterminate stance of the author:

“Raju had been extra rough that evening, after they’d found a safer spot, bruising her young flesh with the pressure of his knees on her open thighs, the grip of his hard fingers over her firm breasts, the savagery of his brutal mouth as he attacked her lips, her ears, her
throat, her neck, using his tongue like a sharp, pointed weapon designed to hurt not please." (Snapshots, p. 98).

These words provide easy and entertaining reading to the casual, sensation loving readers. At the same time they strip off all the romance and charm associated with sex act. The purpose of the real author, though conveyed in explicit language, is not to glamorize sex. A careful reader can realize and assess the violence instead of love and passion involved in the sex act indulged in with a view to claim possession instead of sharing delicate and intimate feelings. The real author makes the attractive and temptingly enjoyable nature of the sexual experience doubtful with the help of carefully selected words like 'savagery', 'brutal', 'attacked', 'weapon', 'hurt', used to describe the sexual experience.

Obviously, there is an autobiographical touch in 'Snapshots' which creates a semblance of reality in the descriptions thereby arousing a sense of confidence in the readers leading to the popularity of this and other novels of Shobha De inspite of crudity of expression scattered throughout in the bold sexual imageries. At the same time the female readers, more so the educated class, get totally immersed in the episodes as if it were a leaf out of their own lives at one time or the other. Hence 'Snapshots' cannot be merely condemned on the basis of expressions of sexuality and perversions but must dip below the surface to understand the female psyche narrated so dexterously.

'Second Thoughts' definitely marks a certain development in Shobha De's art of fiction writing. "From Socialite Evenings to Second Thoughts, Shobha De has certainly evolved as a sensitive writer." Instead of portraying high society life of liberated modern women indulging in strange type of social behaviour De introduces middle class social background in this novel. Not only
the thematic concerns of the novel but also the treatment of the subject matter will
definitely make De's critics have second thoughts about her fiction. The story of
the novel is very simple but it becomes more interesting and revealing with De's
use of her fictional skills very cleverly and artistically. The different narrative
strategies used in this novel have the potential to convince the readers and the
literary critics that Shobha De can produce a valuable fictional work without taking
recourse to the elements that are generally considered the gimmicks of a best-
seller.

The novel deals with the protagonist Maya's desperate experience during
her sterile marriage with Ranjan and her indulgence in extramarital relations with
Nikhil. The use of first person narrator provides authenticity to the life and
experiences presented in the novel. Only the Prologue is in the third person,
otherwise the whole novel records the protagonist's experiences in the first
person. The use of the first person narrator develops a particular perspective to
understand the factors, working in the background, that result in Maya's immoral
behaviour. Maya's presentation of the fictional narrative from her own point of
view makes the fictional discourse biased. The way she gives details about the
behaviour of her husband develops into an explanation for her temporary
aberration with Nikhil. Within a year of their married life she is made to experience
a miserably 'lonely' life and kitchen becomes symbolic of her refuge.
Consequently she never feels 'wanted or welcomed in the bedroom.' Ranjan was
so completely self-absorbed that the occasional attention he paid to Maya was
nothing more than 'a car check.' Nikhil seems to have exploited her condition in
which she felt 'desperately lonely.' Certain comments express Maya's thinking
about her affairs with Nikhil and tend to build a particular perspective that does
not blame Maya for her infidelity:
“I have no clear-cut answer. I can only say that I was helpless and wanted to go out with you very desperately. Please don't misunderstand me or misjudge me. As you do know by now, I'm not that type of person. I am not a flirt. I’ve never been cheap. Maybe God will punish me for this. But in my heart of hearts, I know I didn't do anything wrong. Is it a sin to want to go out and breathe the air? I don't have an answer. If God is to punish me for what I've done, he will.” (p. 195).

The fictional details and the arrangements of different incidents show Maya’s life as a movement from desperation to deceit. The protagonist narrator uses a heightened sense of patriarchal suppression of women to present herself as a victim of circumstances.

The gradual development of Maya’s relationship has been expressed with the help of minute details and small incidents that have a deep impact on her mind. These elements express her inner feelings that remain elusive to an objective observer. Maya being the participant character could re-create these details, “Nikhil noticed me, that was enough. His eyes registered interest—there was no mistaking that” (p. 32). In the same way, the impact of Nikhil’s thoughts on her brings out her feelings in concrete shape, “As Nikhil’s image formed in my mind (it took a while forming since I was busy chasing it away), I felt a strange relaxation come over me. I stopped trying to resist the melting ache that was flowing through my rigid body” (p. 33).

The details about the people living in Maya’s surroundings in Bombay whom she refers to as, “caricatural Hindi movie characters” (p. 86) create a particular image of the life in Bombay. The details about gradual development of
Maya-Nikhil relationship on the pattern of a romantic tale form interesting narrative units that maintain the reader's interest.

The effective use of 'Prologue' forms a significant narrative device in 'Second Thoughts'. The 'Prologue' becomes a well planned and essential part of the narrative structure. Presented in the third person narration it creates a suitable background and gives a view of the socio-cultural situation in which the whole narrative is situated. The prologue brings out the patriarchal hold on the social structure that plays a decisive role in making Maya's married life miserable and agonizing. The meeting of Maya and her mother Chitra with Ranjan and his mother, before Maya's marriage reveals the functioning of patriarchal system. Ranjan's words provide enough indication about the society that provides superior position to man, "I believe it is a woman's duty to run a good home" (p. 11).

The major thematic concerns that unfold in the fictional narrative are very carefully sprinkled in the 'Prologue' itself. As the novel progresses the developments that initiate Maya’s fascination for Bombay and her desperation in her married life with Ranjan gain greater significance and relevance due to the background developed in the 'Prologue'. The incident related to the corpse lying on the railway platform, that occurs in the 'Prologue', gains symbolic significance when we see Maya, the protagonist, treated as a nobody, and almost like a dead person by her husband. Maya's failure to show open rebellion against Ranjan's cold, dry and insensitive behaviour can be explained in terms of the impact of patriarchal set-up and the subtle ways in which the established social system marginalizes women.

The depiction of characters having roots in particular social background and specific cultural traits suits the fictional narrative in 'Second Thoughts.' Instead of presenting characters based on stereotypical images created by media
the author tends to introduce characters who look lifelike and have marked social concerns. There are a limited number of characters. The story is mainly about Maya, Ranjan and Nikhil. The individual traits of these characters make them move like living human beings and bring out the peculiarities of these characters in an emphatic way. An image of Maya’s character can be formed from the details about her outlook, social background, education and behaviour provided in the novel, “Maya had inherited her father’s tall lithe frame, long tapered fingers and a full generous mouth. From her mother she had acquired her thick, glossy hair and luminous dark eyes” (p. 5). Similarly, the details about Nikhil give an idea of his character and personality. His outlook, his behaviour, people’s views about him and his involvement with Maya present him as a carefree, romantic young man who wants to enjoy life without restrictions and shows little concern for stale relationships.

The role of minor characters like Chitra, Mrs. Malik, Pushpa and Maya’s maternal uncle becomes a useful narrative device to express thematic nuances in ‘Second Thoughts’. Maya’s mother Chitra is a typical middle class Indian woman who is worried about the marriage of her daughter and writes a letter of advice to her daughter after her marriage. Ranjan’s mother represents a typical middle class Indian mother-in-law. She wants to keep her son under her control and never bothers about her daughter-in-law. Nikhil’s mother plays the role of a neighbour in a big city like Bombay. All these characters help create a particular social background to provide a suitable fictional framework to the narrative. Their behaviour, no doubt, shows them as stereotypical characters yet they facilitate the creation of a compatible world order. The whole fictional world indicating a particular social structure that controls and directs Maya’s life comes alive through the functional role of these characters.
The presentation of minute details about people's behaviour, thoughts, their ethnic mind set and regional peculiarities forms another useful narrative device in 'Second Thoughts.' All these details have been presented in such a way that the narrative becomes a significant study in contrasts. In the 'Prologue' itself Maya's first visit from Calcutta to Bombay makes her notice the difference between the two cities. The people's attitude towards the corpse on the Bombay platform, where none of the thousands of people bothers about the dead man, compels Maya to consider the comparative attitude of the people in Calcutta:

"Had it been a platform in Calcutta, it would have been difficult to even get out of the compartment. There would have been a thick, over-helpful crowd converged around the corpse with everybody talking simultaneously, excitedly and demanding immediate answers." (p.2)

Shobha De's careful use of certain phrases and other linguistic expressions makes the narrative interesting, subtle and artistic. These expressions gain symbolic significance and have a great power to evoke almost the real feelings and lifelike situations. The sterile relationship between Maya and Ranjan is brought out by sprinkling of certain linguistic expressions like "dimly lit ceiling", 'closed doors' 'iron bars' 'self-absorbed' 'crippling loneliness, self conscious nature', 'feeble affection', 'unholy matrimony' 'desperately lonely' etc. Similarly, there are certain expressions that connote the failure of Maya's marriage with Ranjan, for example, 'resident cook', 'refuge' 'strange emptiness' 'deliberate act of neglect'. This sprinkling of typical expressions marks a particularly effective and intense way of evoking certain experiences. These expressions indicate the proximity between the content and the achieved content. The narrative becomes so gripping and informing the immediacy of experience, that one feels convinced
that the narrator is indeed expressing her first-hand experiences. Certain gestures of different characters and their impact on the narrator protagonist have been expressed in such a way that the reader may experience the exact feelings conveyed through Maya's words. De's narrative method carries the spirit of the experience through words. This marks a careful selection and effective use of vocabulary at her disposal.

The effective use of irony becomes an important narrative device in 'Second Thoughts.' Like her earlier novels, the real author's concerns in 'Second Thoughts' are revealed through the subtle use of irony. In this novel, irony sets at work right from the opening of the novel. Maya finds herself, 'falling inexorably in love' with Bombay and feels, "Marrying Ranjan would make her a part of it immediately. If she were lucky enough to become the other Mrs. Malik, Maya knew she'd be bonded with Bombay forever" (p. 12). Ironically, all her hopes turn into despair and she finds herself entrapped in the bonds of a charmless, sterile and meaningless marriage. The people in the city also treat her as 'another housewife from Calcutta.' Her experience of 'crippling loneliness' and 'deliberate neglect' shown by her husband shatter her dreams.

The ironical presentation of the real author's concerns through different characters, particularly the protagonist make the novel artistic and socially relevant. It seems that the real author tends to show how a suppressed and marginalized woman may be tempted to seek some relief in extramarital relations. The abrupt ending of Maya-Nikhil relationship and the failure of this relationship to provide any permanent solution shows that the author does not approve such things. Her only concern is to show the sufferings and agony that a woman like Maya undergoes.
The different narrative elements that constitute the structure of 'Second Thoughts' make it an excellent fictional creation. De's exploration of new horizons is remarkably interesting and artistic. The development of the story showing the slow drifting away of the protagonist from the established code marks De's creative skill. The movement of the plot coincides with the gradual development of the theme. Based on the small but extremely significant and decisive incidents and moments in a woman's life the novel develops into a perfect whole. It is Shobha De's art of story-telling and her effective style that exhibits a definite development in her art. A development in De's art of novel writing has also been noticed by Jaydipsinh Dodiya, "Second Thoughts is Shobha De's masterpiece." De's achievement in 'Second Thoughts' lies in the effective and unified impact created with the help of different narrative devices. There is hardly any detail or an incident that does not contribute, in one way or the other, to the total structure of the novel. The descriptions of places, atmosphere, persons, things, people with their individual and cultural traits function as dynamic parts of the total framework of the novel. The washer man, the banana-seller woman, the postman, the dead body on the platform, apart from other characters and details, become inseparable and useful units. An important aspect of De's fictional art in 'Second Thoughts' is the presentation of the slice of life that seems firmly rooted in the real life experience of middle class Indian women. Maya's experience brings out the lived experience of many such women in traditional Indian families. Instead of the outrageous and strikingly shocking and unbelievable pattern of life that finds expression in De's earlier novels the life spectacle in 'Second Thoughts' reveals De's deep understanding and intense sensitivity towards the sorrows and pains of women who undergo suffocating experiences in the name of marriage.
A study of Shobha De's novels shows that her style is journalistic, cliché ridden, colloquial and marked with the use of a mixed language. De's understanding of the public mind helps her make her fiction popular among the masses as she creates the romantic world of their dreams. She successfully exploits the popular image of the affluent, socialite people in the minds of the ordinary people. She uses stereotypical incidents, characters and situations to produce her work according to the public taste. She herself seems to be fully aware of the tactics she uses to create such a type of fiction. She, therefore, treats the fictional stereotypes ironically and satirizes their propagation. De's attitude and her narrative stance can be clearly seen from the endings of her novels. All the characters who lead uninhibited, promiscuous life of the Richie-Rich industrialists, starlets and the social prowlers, either finally disappear from the scene or repent and regret such life.

A brief survey very aptly shows Shobha De's perceptive portrayal of the secret depths of the human psyche; her accurate characterization; her 'saucy, racy and captivating' style invokes vivid images and compels a reader to identify himself or herself with the characters and situations. She had tried her best to expose the moral and spiritual breakdown of modern materialist society, where a hapless and forsaken woman longs for pleasure and craves for flying freely in the free sky; where the hypocrites and the dishonest are gaining ground by leaps and bounds; where in the words of W.B.Yeats, 'the best lack all convictions/ while the worst are full of passionate intensity.' Though she has been severely criticized yet we should always bear in our mind that whatever she has penned down, they are all fine pieces of poetic—brilliance or metaphoric structure which linger to haunt our mind long after finishing them. What actually matters most in her writings is her simplicity of language—a language which is beautifully handled to
accommodate or rather dramatize—the ebb and flow of emotions to project the different layers of the subconscious or unconscious mind, a language that sometimes breaks the conventional rules of grammar and syntax, abandons orthodox punctuation, coins neologism, runs sense impressions with synaesthetic richness. To sum up, her work encompasses its own exquisite world of passion, romance, fantasy and inevitably hard reality.
NOTES & REFERENCES


