CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION: MAKING OF THE NOVELIST

Shobha De, Rajadhyaksha was born in January 1948 in a noble, affectionate and well reputed family of Justice Govind Hari Rajadhyaksha who belonged to a Saraswat Brahmin community in Satara, Maharashtra. At the time of Shobha De's birth, her father was appointed as a Magistrate in Satara. During the span of his life, he was endowed with the post of assistant solicitor in Delhi and then the joint secretary in the Ministry of Law being posted in Mumbai.

Shobha De started her early education in Delhi Public School in Delhi and graduated from St. Xavier's College Bombay in Psychology and Sociology. She was not so much interested in her studies as in extra-curricular activities provided all around her. She reveals such facts in the following lines: "Studies did not interest me.... There was a life right outside the classroom that I vastly preferred. And I wanted to make all the most of it." During her school days, she participated the state level Athletics and other competitions and set state level record in long jump. Her father did not like her such attitude but having been of independent nature, Shobha De began working in the field of modeling. She was introduced to the field of modeling with the help of Shashi Banker. In order to fulfill her ambition of enjoying independence and to earn sufficient money, she continued working as a model along with other activities of her life.
She was introduced to the field of writing with the help of Mr. Nari Hira, a Sindhi businessman who brought Shobha De in the contact of Shilpa Shah. Shilpa Shah succeeded to fill Shobha De with much inspiration and curiosity. Shobha De attained vigour and enthusiasm and changed her life and future career with the help of writing. Describing the significant incidents in her life, Shobha De says, "I did not choose modeling, it choose me. I did not choose writing, writing chose me." She enjoyed writing on different aspects of life freely and entered into the field of journalism in 1970 with Stardust in which she exhibited the genius of objectivity about society. She also revealed her own experience about the people who are devoid of loyalty, friendship, culture and civilization. Having been driven with unavoidable circumstances, she left Stardust in 1980.

Shobha De adopted dynamic and industrious personality. Due to her extra-ordinary characteristics, she was well known as super model, celebrity, journalist and best selling author. Although her life was dedicated to her work in various fields, she gave first priority to her family. In her teenage, she entered into the glamour of modeling and also spent her high profile years as a magazine editor, columnist social commentator, T.V. scriptwriter and author. In order to get reputation in various fields of her life, she made successful efforts to observe and experience various aspects of the society.
She started her literary career as a journalist and founded and edited three popular magazines 'Stardust', 'Society' and 'Celebrity'. She was also working as consulting Editor to 'Sunday' and 'Megacity'. One can easily imagine her genius an excellent literary career by her seventeen books. The first seventh of them are novels. Her publication are 'Socialite Evenings' (1989), 'Starry Nights' (1990), 'Sisters' (1992), 'Strange Obsession' (1992), 'Sultry Days' (1994) 'Snapshots' (1995), 'Second Thoughts' (1996), 'Uncertain Liaisons' (co-edited with Khushwant Singh) (1993), 'Shooting From The Hip: Selected Writing' (1994), 'Serving Men' (1997), 'Selective Memory' (1998) 'Small Betrayals' (1995) and 'Speedpost' (2000). She provided us two T.V. serials named Swabhiman and Sukanya which were telecasted by DD1 and DD2 in 1997 and 2001 respectively. Although she is bearing the responsibility of a mother having six children, she didn't give up writing.

In the Vedic age, our women were given proper position in the society but later on they lost their equal rights in the society. So literary personalities began to focus the real condition of women in their works. In Indian English Literature, we find a series of women novelists who tried to portray different problems of women and their genuine aspirations for economic independence, equality and freedom. Going back to the nineteenth century, we are introduced with many women novelists who deal with changing socio-cultural trends in which our women are struggling to acquire their free, equal and just status in
the society. The first English novel by an Indian woman is *The Hindu Life: The Enchanted Fruit* (1976). In this reference, Shobha De is considered as a novelist who is writing in the background of a long tradition. She seems to follow the norms and principles of the novels that belonged to contemporary traditional novelists. Some of the male novelists like R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand have also dealt the theme of women's conditions and problems in Indian society.

In her works, Shobha De narrates different complications prevailing in Indian society, family and life style. Many of the critics consider her descriptions too harsh, brutish, crude and uncivilized. In order to reveal the actual picture of society, she chose the urban life, which she considers the mark of human civilization. She raises question mark on contemporary civilization saying that such kind of progress is not the meaning of civilization. It is unfortunate that few critics neglect the under currents of her fictions and consider her a writer only expose the hollowness of Indian urban life, family and society.

Shobha De doesn't seem to follow the attitude and ideals established by her predecessors. She makes successful effort to expose the facts that were distressing the women folk. She represents the women who are furious to convey a strong message to the people of the society. She chooses the theme according to her own independent spirit and never cares for critics. Describing
her own unique spirit, she reveals: “I was caught between the two, not quite here not quite there, perhaps because of the publicity I received. My books were regarded with suspicion and skepticism for being commercially successful. We were still clinging to the virtue of low-key....When I think back, was phenomenal by those days' standards, but modest by today's.”

A magazine edited by Shobha De was 'Celebrity' which could not stand on ground of popularity and brought her financial bankruptcy. She began to feel isolated from her family as well as society. Consequently, she has to face divorce from her husband Sudhir. Afterwards her 'Socialite Evenings' got success and it filled her with fresh inspiration and zeal to continue her writing. After the success of 'Socialite Evenings', she began to write her works starting all the titles with 'S'. Her stormy explosion in her works exhibits that she is extra ordinary storyteller having no fixed or particular idea and she has feminist approach to impress and influence the whole community.

Shobha De was absolutely dedicated to her family and writing. In the reference of her writing, she never cared for the criticism of critics as well as common readers. She was confident that she had never done unusual which may bar the progress of civilization. She is never considered as a serious writer because she always wrote what she regards true, noble and just. Gradually she got success to improve and brighten her career through writing and she “built her life word by word, column by column, book by book the word factory.” Impartial analysis of her works makes it clear that while writing, she is serious,
sensitive, responsible and alert. Although critics accuse her as a vamp writer, masala writer and pulp writer, she clarifies that she writes the same things, which occur to her naturally. She doesn’t seem to distort the facts being driven by any prejudice. She herself conveys the reality found in her works: “My books have always been one step ahead of the wave. But I make no conscious effort to reinvent myself... each new book has its own specific context and validity.”

Shobha De introduces a strong woman protagonist in each of her books and makes effort to represent the real condition of women in the society. Having been a woman, she has unlimited sympathy for women folk. She finds herself unable to bear the pangs of patriarchy and seem to revolt against the cruelty thrust upon women. According to her opinion, a writer is the product of his/her immediate environment and her moral duty is to expose real condition of the environment. A writer ought to write regularly, ideally and every single day. She gives full importance to the youth of the society and tries to narrate all the activities related to them. She seems to respect the reaction expressed at her works. In her works, we find unique harmony with rhyme and rhythm of time with full faith. The designation of her works is capable to shock the readers. She is considered as a renowned storyteller who succeeds to establish honest appraisal of human relationship with impartial and clear eyes.

In her fictions, Shobha De portrays the real picture of darker side of human nature, the squalor and the evil in the society as well as in human
relationship. Through the mouths of the characters she narrates the stories which are based on some real story. Expressing the real situation about her works, Shobha De comments: "Subject of my books are my own which I pick up from the people around me.... My writing is based on ideas. I don't write to harm society. The rotten inside of society may be our subject." Shobha De can not be regarded as a revolutionary writer, she depicts the reality of the society, the real human ties and behaviour. She is considered as a social commentator who believes that social reformation may be brought by impressive writing but practically she has no aim to reform the society or to bring revolution. She portrays the phenomenon all around her. But she seems to stimulate Indian women to bring change in their status. Besides it, she has no ambition to change the world, topple government and make heads roll.

In spite of these bright aspects, she confronts cruel criticism of various critics: “Her name Shobha De (Day) but her subject is night. The writer of colorful novels, she is known as the ‘Merchant of Sex’. Driven by excess use of male-female relations, the critics accuses her in such way. Analysis of her works does not justify the accusations of critics because she has many merits in her writing and many of the commentators give her deep reverence, high praise and wide admiration. In this reference, we may quote Malavika Sangghvi who holds different opinion about her. She confesses: “Shobha De... a woman who has been a celebrity, forgets all manners of accusations, for almost three decades, this kind of revelation, hardly earth-shaking to these ,is uncommon.
Shobha De is tired of having to deal with what is projected on to her, goddess successful author, one time model, social commentator.”

Shobha De seems to make attempt to relieve herself from negative remarks from various critics. In her opinion, all the charges imposed on her are the result of prejudiced, whimsical and partial mind. Such kind of criticism shouldn’t be justified because she always tries to find something new for which she will have to think freely and newly without any fear of criticism. In the support of her description in ‘Starry Nights’ she clarifies: “Abusive, raw and employing the filthy idioms of gutters...caused waves when it was published. My deliberate as of Hindi epithets and the descriptive sex sense got everybody worked up, which was rather precious. There was nothing in the book that was not known to the public, nothing the fanzines hadn’t already written about. Nothing that was not being proclaimed on prominent hoardings dotting the city. Everybody knew just how sordid this life was, but my retelling of it was found obscene and objectionable.” She confesses that she exposed the sex scene in her works but many other writers who are also in the same line as she herself. She condemns Khushwant Singh who goes to the worst in this reference. She only wants to bring awakening in the society. She criticizes Khushwant Singh’s ‘The Company of Woman’ furiously: “I may write something for stronger in future. I shall definitely not write of woman. It gives sex a bad name. My fantasies happen to be far more imaginative. Khushwant should never have written the book.... sex, in Khushwant case, has always been in his head. And there it should have remained.”
Shobha De criticizes the readers and critics who try to extract wrong meaning and message of her writings. In her opinion, such people don’t have logical insight and are unable understand the undercurrent of her writings. She further says due to their immature views, critics are unable to find analytical surrey in her novels and other works. She blames the critics saying in her novels and other works. She blames the critics saying that they try to look for dirt in works while her works are not so. The genuine scrutiny of her works portray that Shobha De is a true narrator and painter of society. Although Shobha De is considered as a vamp feminist, she claims that she is the supporter of women’s welfare. She shows sympathy towards women deeply and proves herself as a humanist. Without waving the feminist flag, she is dedicated to reveal the real condition of women but that is based on humanistic ground. On the theoretical level, she denies to be a feminist but her feminist concern cannot be denied. The fact is apparent when she confesses: “I had always been gravting towards women. I was a women’s woman and writing comes to me naturally as breathing.”

Shobha De always writes driven by her inner urge and consciousness without any fear and hesitation. She herself approves that “as writer I am concerned with humanity at large. I hate bringing gender into it. I am not a social reformer... I don’t dislike men.” Such discloser intends to label Shobha De a humanistic approach. She is blamed to offer vulgar literature but pornography found in her works becomes a system and symbol of female’s defiance of male regulated sexuality. The real scrutiny of Shobha De's novels
prove that she treats men and women on equal terms. In this reference, She observes: “It is time they were made aware of their own potential and power. *Shakti needs to be harnessed, directed and explored for the furtherance of over all human development. Man will have to come to terms with woman power.*”

In fact Shobha De projects the darker side of human nature. She often seems to explore what is evil and squalor in the society and in human relationship.

In the opinion of Shobha De, the economic condition is highly responsible to make women inferior to men. They must be provided economic equality. They are equally capable to earn money. Their status cannot be established on the equality if they are economically dependent. There will be no possibility of independence for women without economic self-sufficiency. We cannot maintain our mind and spirit independent when our body and soul is controlled by someone else. The argument makes it clear that money is very significant aspect in human life and human relationship. In her practical life, she realizes that money destroys the peace of a family. In modern time the peace and bliss of a married life changes into disharmony and suffering for the sake of money. Money is the prominent issue which creates question on each and every act of a couple. In her personal life, she seems to give importance to trust rather than money because trust is the base where all human relations are strengthened and harmonized. An individual should always makes effort to bring creative change in his or her attitude or behaviour.
In her practical life, Shobha De advocated humanistic cum-feministic approach. In ‘Selective Memory’ she argues: "Money matter have always embarrassed me perhaps 'stumped' is a better word. I hate discussing money, though I enjoy making it. I belonged to that self-conscious generating of woman who thought it ‘unfeminine’ to discuss money. Money is sexless.” Money was certainly a significant issue in her life but that was not her main one. She provides detailed revelation of her practical life in her works. Many factors are derived from her works because a writer pours his or her own experiences and observations in his or her works. Disclosing the secret of her private life, she asserts: “I didn’t want to be anything at all, except a happy, carefree young person.” In her father’s family she realizes extreme ease and happiness. She used to share every experience with her father’s family. Whenever she met a person who left an impression of any sort, she came home and shared the experience with the family. She was highly influenced by her father’s family. She reveals the fact: “Perhaps it is because I belong to a large family that I decided to have more than one child myself. When see my children today, I feel they value each other’s presence for more in future, even if they don’t recognize that fully right now I was never lonely as the child. And I’ve never been lonely as an adult. The family has always been there to lean on... talk to... laugh with... even cry with.”

Describing her spirit and tendency, she discloses that she didn’t devote her time to make friendship and other emotional relations. Emotional ties had not significance in her life. She always liked the association of family
members. In her opinion, all the relations of life are based on trust. She didn’t want to be emotionally hurt so she maintain distance to unfamiliar people who may cause irritation early or late. Fortunately, she got success to secure harmony and association inside her father’s family. She reveals her personal relationship with her sister Kunda: “As a young girl, my secrets were shared only with my sister Kunda. There was nothing I wished to hide from her.”

She was very often lost in the pleasure of her children, about them she makes it clear: “When I had kids of my own, I vowed to be a more ‘touchy-freely’ parent and I am glad, I've broken through my own inhibitions. For years, I couldn’t get myself to utter those magical words (I Love You) even in the romantic relationship. Today I can say them easily to my children and mean every word. I accept their love. And I am training myself to deal with their outburst of hostility too. I am glad, they feel free enough to express their feelings- positive and negative.”

In her personal life, Shobha De gives much importance to parental love and affection. After her divorce, she continues to respect her ex. mother-in-law and says that she will always the grandmother of her (Shobha De’s) children. She seems to be driven by her ideal father. Her father still reminds her about some important things like, “keep your nostril clean, pay your taxes, love your family and country, do morally correct things, choose the right path. A man of character always knows the difference between right and wrong.”
She possesses all the traits of an ideal mother. She seems to fulfill all the responsibilities of a skilled mother. She narrates her feelings when she is utterly cautious of the safety and supervision of her children: “Our children are not safe on the streets. They are not at all safe in the home either, without constant supervision.”20

Shobha De won the ‘Reuters Fellowship Award’ to make her career graceful and renowned. She was the first Asian woman to win that award. At that occasion, she didn’t leave her family to avail herself of that great offer because she was much cautious about her married life. Unaware of this fact, R.S. Pathak gives contrary argument: “Marriage is not regarded as essential in the fictional world of Shobha De.”21 Shobha De denies such unjust occasion. Just after ninety minutes of her divorce from her first husband Sudhir in July 1984, she married Dilip. It shows that she gives much importance to marriage. She confesses that she liked being married and to enjoy a married life because an unmarried or divorced woman is never respected in a society. She considers marriage as a bond in which a man and a woman are together, even at times when the sight, smell and sound of the other drives you crazy. Marriage is a symbolic relationship where one feels on others, depends on other and needs the other. She is deeply and highly moved by her first unsuccessful married life. She is optimist of leading a healthy and harmonious life among her family. She has faith in God and prays Him for the welfare of her family: “May it always be this way. May six of them stay close and supportive of one another. May they be friends in their later years. May their children love one another.
May they wish each other well always. That’s all I really want today, peace and joy within our family.”

Shobha De gave priority to maintain peace and harmony of her family. The happiness of her life depended on the happiness of her family. She seems to seek warmth, love and security among her family members. She considers that pleasure of a happy family is like the pleasure of heaven. In her opinion, everyone should seek heavenly bliss in his or her family. In an interview to Nandini Guha of ‘The Saturday Statesman’ she exposes her view about marriage: “A bad marriage kills love, a good one can only enhance it.”

Shobha De was deeply moved by the pathetic condition of women. She wants to bring awakening among them and stimulates them by her impressive and revolutionary writing: “They (women) definitely don’t want to be like their mothers and they desperately want to switch places with their daughters. We talk of options, opportunities and choices, we are sure we have them.”

She feels dejected inside her when she finds that in spite of doing a lot for the society, women are forced to suffer and weep. She is fully aware of women’s miserable plight. In an interview, she points out critical condition of women: “World is like that.... Nothing new. Women are never the world's priority. Why should it be any different now? We were ignored earlier. We are ignored now. And we shall continue to be ignored.... It could be ten years from now or even ten centuries. We’ll wait. We're patient.”
The prime challenge, which women face in their life is identity crisis. They don’t have their own identification. They are introduced with the names of men. Today women face duel challenge. They have to prepare their own background on which they can create their own identity. Their role in the society has changed greatly. Although they have freedom in many walks of life, social view is the same as before. In order to change the social attitude, women must have economic independence. They have to come out from their sharmelee (shy) figure. They have to face every challenge themselves because men don’t seem to digest their well being, progress and equal position. In the opinion of Shobha De, women should be fully aware of their freedom in various fields. They should be cautious for their honour, empowerment, betterment, health, legal and political rights and security. She is in the favour of making them well educated and independent. They may secure their existence by full awareness in every walk of life. Women should evaluate their ability and should not be dependent on others. In her writings, Shobha De is found revealing feminist thoughts, which enable women to be worthy and skilled so that they may aspire for awareness, enlightenment, self-realization and self-discipline. They must have ambition to be self-dependent. In order to lead a prestigious life, they should be given the power to take their decisions themselves.

Shobha De appreciates the principles of Manusmriti which says that the women who are kept under the constant vigil, are not safe. Only those women are safe who can defend themselves by their own virtues. Shobha De seems to
favour the ideal statement given by Radhakrishnan. In the view of Radhakrishnan, good and capable women are required to make civilization great. No nation can progress unless it has good and well-educated women. Women are considered the backbone and maker of the future of a nation, society and civilization. Education, economics, quality, opportunity and honor are basic needs which may provide them emancipation, empowerment and enlightenment.

Shobha De has ambition to liberate women from all the bondages, which provide them inferior position. She considers herself a middle class traditional type of woman who is hungry for experience and learning. She is well acquainted with the fact that not only physical but also intellectual growth is essential to free them from all the fetters. Shobha De does not have jealous feeling for men because their role in the formation of a civilized society is equally significant. She wishes to become a grand mother, which is not possible without the co-operation of other sex. The burning phase of feminism having been over, she favours the latest mode of it. Nisha Millet explains the trends of this latest mode: “What women need today is for men to realize that they have a lot of potential and are capable of great height. Despite the tremendous progress mode by women in different fields, many of us are still unable to realize our full potential because of the constraints around us. Men and society need to realize that women can be independent.” In the opinion of the novelist, woman can get self respect, family support, self confidence and other dignities by her devotion, love, sacrifice and mutual understanding with
her male partner. Women are still striving to achieve equality, justice and development but they are creating a realization that this goal can be obtained by working along with men as partners.

In her novels, Shobha De introduces not only protagonist but other characters also who convey feminist cum humanist thoughts and actions. Shobha De is considered as a winter of entertaining fiction. She lacks seriousness while disclosing complicated situations of women. Her first novel ‘Socialite Evenings’ (1989) is a story of a young middle class girl who is fascinated towards film and modeling. Her other works Starry Nights (1991), Sisters (1992), Strange Obsession (1992), Sultry Days (1994), Snapshots (1995) and Second Thoughts (1996) are devoid of seriousness. Shobha De is harshly criticized by A. G. Khan, S. P. Swain and M.K. Naik. Inspired of so many criticism imposed on her, Shobha De possess extraordinary talent by which she portrays very sensitive aspects of human life. She is skilled in narrating man-woman relationship and succeeds to acquire high praise and wide admiration at national as well as international level. Only orthodox minded people criticize her for open discussion of sexual matters. Shoha De is a creative writer who is becoming immensely popular day by day. She is well reputed for introducing extra ordinary narrative technique as well as subject matter. Alexander Monti, Nisha Trivedi, Jaydipsinh Dodiya are the chief literary persons who regard De’s novels genuine piece of literature having a positive vision. Jaydipsinh Dodiya considers her a feminist writer just like Nayantara Sehgal and Shashi Deshpande because she narrates basically
women’s problem and provides a new approach. In her works, **Shobha De** portrays the picture of aristocratic society, which represents the contemporary India. In her novels, women are introduced facing different challenges and protesting against patriarchy. She imagines a protagonist who succeeds to attack patriarchy establishing an ideal for other women.

**A. G. Khan** accuses Shobha De saying that her novels portray her feelings of alienation from traditional craft to nudity and vulgarity. Shobha De conveys her feelings, which is filled with bitter helplessness. Explaining the situation, she observes: “*She (woman) cannot call even her body own. She is an object of man’s lust and sexuality. She has nowhere to go. She is confined to the four corners of the house.*”

Shobha De is criticized for ignoring major portion of the society. She chooses only upper class urban life. So her works lack close acquaintance with Indian life and society. Like other women writers, Shobha De also has defects and shortcomings in her works. In her works, we don’t find co-relation among time-action-space. **Shobha De** doesn’t agree with the accusation imposed on her and comments that to write about society which is not intimately known to me and to win, some favour or sympathy would be cheating. I would call it a writer’s dishonesty. Shobha De delineates concrete realities of contemporary world. While explaining various issues and human values, she exhibits the maturity of thoughts. Undoubtedly, Shobha De has been successful in everything in the field of
literature. She understands it well that criticism is often the other side of coin of envy.

Most of the critics are unable to evaluate Shobha De on the ground of reality. They sum to cross the limit of logic. A few of the critics are just to regard her as a successful novelist. Actually Indian women do not have ground of her own to stand that is why critics are free to comment on her rationally or irrationally. The proposed study will attempt to show through thematic study of Shobha De’s novels. Most of the critics have failed to grasp the real meaning of her novels. Therefore, we shall attempt to examine in the chapters that follow what is real Shobha De and what are her real concern expressed in her novels.
Works Cited


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22- Selective Memory. P.481.
24- Selective Memory. P.414.