Self-Delusion and Fragmentation in the Modern Family System

Selected Novels of Shobhaa De

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MEHZBEEN SADRIWALA

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Foreword

Shobhaa De is considered to be one of the prolific writers of the late 20th century. De is a multiple personality, started her career as a model who turned to be a columnist/journalist. She established her career by adopting versatile writing. She is a well-known columnist and a frank writer on any social issue without any hesitation. Her novels always deal with the life of socialites that is filled with depiction of sensual intrigues. Her novels deal with the life of urban women in particular. Her controversial writings brought back much criticism. De's contribution to Indian English Literature is worth discussing, because it introduces a new variety of women writing. She happens to be one of the most brilliant stars who spoke about marginalization in culture and society full-throatily. She has been unhesitant in discussing very sensitive aspects of human life, especially woman relationships, through her profound understanding of contemporary urban women's position and challenges. Her novels depict the life of urban women in India. Her choice of subject is always the life of women who is related to media, cinema or ad agency. It is very interesting for the readers to know about the women who belong to one of these fields. Her women are definitely not doormats, nor are they not willing to be kicked around. Most of the heroines of De belong to media and cinema hence her portrayal of these colorful worlds shows the hidden realities of women's lives. She depicts the lives of women in her novels with regard to their psyche, career, suppression, depression, psychological traumas and sexual desires. The excess

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use of sexual matters may cause discomfort but her frank narration and the underlying theme of the story give her writing a unique identity. Searching for identity, cultural changes, insecurity, feminism, lesbianism, liberalisation, disorientation, realism, tradition and modernity and fragmentation are some of the themes dealt by Shobhaa De. The women characters in her novels lead the story and the story revolves around them. Her novels focus on the transformation of women's identity in the society, particularly in urban middle class society. The urban woman aspires to achieve something in her life. But her dreams are shattered with the influence of love, marriage and sex, and above all the discouraging influence of the male. As almost all the characters hail from middle class background and their willingness to come up in life,De has been uniquely successful in portraying beautifully. The women of Shobhaa De are innocent in the beginning but as their experience grows, they realize the real meaning of life. Feminism, lesbianism and homosexuality are some of emerging postmodern concepts are also given prominence in her novels. The world of women is beautifully described with excess sexual desires. One of the most important and striking aspects in her novels is that her women have mutual concern towards married life and individual identity. And, at times, she is ready to sacrifice even her identity as a married woman to gain position in her personal aspiration. Thus Shobhaa De proved herself as a postmodern writer in terms of subject-matter, style, approach and language.

Dr. Mehzbeen Sadriwala, the writer of this book entitled, *Self-Delusion and Fragmentation in the Modern Family System in Selected Novels of Shobhaa De,* is a profound thinker and writer of many books, articles and research papers, besides being a teacher and a very sensitive human. What I found in this book is that, it displays an acute sense of understanding, profundity of

thought added by deep and insightful research work on Shobhaa De's novels. All the seven chapters of this book contain the writer's emphatic deep insight that transports the reader into altogether different world of fact and fiction, where the reader enthusiastically and comfortably finds himself in between these two opposite but realistic poles, which is the very essence of post-modern social phenomenon.

Dr. Sadriwala, as far as I know her personally, is a prolific researcher, a sensitive observer of her surroundings and also an expressionist. The reader can get convinced by her ideas, arguments and derivations, which have been established by her own original abilities shown above. Besides being a lively professor, her abilities in communicating the things is marvelously exemplary. This is quite evident in this book. In short, this book is an amalgamation of all her abilities, perceptions, understandings, and sincere efforts of findings. Her personality, thinking and expressions match each other, i.e. there is a tremendous coordination between what she thinks, what she says and what she acts. The present book is a live example of all these.

I strongly recommend its purchase to not only a researcher, but a general reader too, who will surely gain a deeper sense of quirkiness, the subtleties and complexities of the inner world. I wish Dr. Mehzbeen Sadriwala every success in her life.

Dr. S. S. Thakur
Prof. of English
Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee
Govt. Arts and Commerce College
Indore (M.P)

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Preface

It is true that she writes about sexuality and her fiction contains almost every variety of sexuality and her fiction contains almost every variety of sexual behaviour - heterosexuality, homosexuality, incest, and lesbianism, but she is more than this. She is generally described as a feminist, which she clearly denies. She rejects this level. She does not want to be confined to the gender. Then what is she? She prefers to call herself a humanist. It is but natural that she can be taken as feminist, for she is a woman who writes about women. This thesis aims at the thematic study of her novels, so as to bring out the human values that underline her each novel. The study will show that despite apparent glossy life of permissive high society, the novels in the end project traditional Indian values emphasizing the importance of the family and marital fidelity. Permissiveness and various kinds of sexual behaviour are simply deviations, which are not approved of by the novelist. Her views in this regards are found in her non-fiction writings and interviews.

The book makes an in-depth thematic study of her novels. Her non-fiction writings are referred to in order to illustrate her views on the themes of her novels. The thesis is divided into seventh chapters.

The first chapter is Introduction, which describes Shobhaa De's life in brief, her literary career, critical opinions about her, her own views on her writing, and the aim of the book, i.e. to prove that she is a feminist-humanist. Despite her rejection of the term 'feminist',

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she remains one because she is a woman who writes about women.

The second chapter deals with as feminism is primarily a revolution in social consciousness, it affected literature and criticism from its earliest days. Feminist criticism has now become a fully established branch of literary studies. One section of feminist critics attempt re-reading of literature written by women to discover hidden expressions of feminist protest. As an interesting example of such and Endeavour, we can point out the work of Susan Gubar and Gilbert Sandra who discover 'the mad woman in the Attic' in Jane Eyre as the concealed feminist protest in Bronte. Another section of feminist critics engaged themselves in the task of unearthing forgotten, unknown and unappreciated texts of literary importance. Recent research in this field has brought to limelight several significant female writers like Rokeya Hossein, whose works were for long ignored or considered insignificant. These critics take up re-reading of male texts, too, mostly to unearth the positive of negative attitudes to feminism that these works conceal. Kate Millet's reading of Henry Miller and Normal Mailer, which reveals their essential sexist view, is a pioneering work of this genre.

The third chapter focuses on Shobhaa De's Mind and Art. De is a writer in Indian English Literature which has a rich and a long tradition of women novelist who portrayed the India of our time. Feminist like Kamala Markandaya. Namita Gokhala, Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Shashi Deshpande, has given their genuine aspirations focusing on the parochial society. Shobhaa De writes about the glamorous society of Mumbai at the grass root level. Her mind is more provocative and it understands the sentiments of the reader of the bourgeois world. Her art exposes the neurotic and amoral people of urban society. Her mind

is very sharp and her art is unique and unrepeatable.

The fourth chapter deals with Shobhaa De's approach towards feminism is very simple and not complicated and complex as the western critics term it. She has taken feminism in her practical approach towards life. She applies it in delineating some of the bitter truths of female world, especially the double standard, paradox and exploitation shown by the male-dominated, traditional and orthodox society. She beautifully and candidly highlights the problems of suffering of women caused by the paradoxical, social, cultural and moral values set by men. Shobha De applies marriage, divorce, post-marital relationship, lesbianism etc. as the tools to progress her feminist stance.

The fifth chapter the new concept of pleasure envisages complete sexual freedom which is accompanied by economic freedom; uncontrolled passion is sought by Shobhaa De's women in the form of pleasure. Social rules have always been harsh on women in India. It is justified that a man as an independent being can have extra marital affairs. The society doesn't raise eye brows to those men who leave their wife at home and enjoy with either prostitutes or whores by paying them in cash or kind. No one bothers to think about the woman who is lonely in her home waiting for her husband who doesn't come nights after nights. What she would do in such situation? She can't take her life or ruin herself by crying. A woman is socially not complete without the existence of man in her life and its debarred to enjoy any sexual liaison with any man other than her husband. Her desire for sexual relationship is subordinated to the interest of the society not on her individual feeling.

The six chapter Shobhaa De throws significant light on the predicament of these two young modern women through the depiction of lesbian relationship and explores the inner psychic reality. These women discard

dignity, morality and chastity. They cherish their passions ignoring completely the familial and social norms. Through the portrayal of Minx and Amrita, the novelist rejects and deconstructs images of women. She creates an alternative female identity where a woman sometimes plays the role of man and another plays the role of a 'free woman'. Here one might say that gender identities cannot be changed or exchanged at will. But Shobhaa De's women characters are very good examples who prove it clearly that reversal of roles are possible for women in the present day society. Her women playing the roles of men, occupy the centre whereas men are pushed into the margin. In the novel the male characters such as Partha, Rover and Rakesh as usual appear timid and submissive. They are marginalized in the world created and shaped by women.

The seven chapters deals with grand conclusion of Shobhaa De's and researcher conclusion.

The book also contains which provide a historical survey of woman in Indian culture, the feminist movement, and the Indian women novelist. Besides, and Epilogue is added on the current condition of womankind in India, with an emphasis on practical needs for emancipation of entire nation, through them.

The book ends with a Selected Bibliography. My debt to existing scholarship is acknowledged in the body of the book and bibliography. In the world of scholarship, and that too increasing so fast, it would be presumptuous to claim originality. However, I may modestly say that I have tried to present existing facts in a new light. To what extent I have succeeded is to be decided by others, not by me. Shortcomings and errors, if any, are totally mine.

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