

FEMALE MANUMISSION AND SHOBHA DE

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Abstract :

Every writer and its work reflect the social, economic and political conditions of his or her times. The writers always try to present the aroma of their soil in their works. Indian writers who follow the English language for the literary art also endeavor to present the regional and national conditions in their works. These artists try to depict the Indian realities like social, financial, political and cultural through their art. While focusing on the Indian consciousness the writer sometimes imprison him or her in the fetters of local traditions, shibboleths and conventions. These kinds of fetters failed to obstruct the literary endeavors of writers like Shobha De who vehemently takes arms against the social and cultural evils that suffocate a woman from generations. Her works like the literary outputs of the feminist writers who think that most of the tribulations and agonies of woman are because of her gender. As the traditional society never steps beyond the gender specific roles that have been imposed and in most of cases accepted under the hegemonic patriarchal oppressions is aptly presented in her works where most of the major characters are females. It is the focus on the perplexities and confusion caused only because of the unjust treatment by the male dominated society creates much curiosity among the people for her works. It is her unique treatment of the feminine issues which arouses the readers' interest in her works. By going through her literary world one can be familiarized with effects of male preferential treatment towards women. It is because of the apt presentation of the feminist world with their issues; physical as well as psychological provide immense acceptability to Shobha De's novels. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the marginalized woman who has given space in Shobha De's works where the novelist provides avenues for the vanquished soul to acquaint her fellow beings about her woes and sufferings.

Key words: Culture, exploitation, hegemony, literature, marginalization, patriarchy, traditions and woman etc.

Women from the genesis of the human race on this planet, the male considers her as a non-entity which is made for discrimination and exploitation. The woman from her childhood is reared in such a way that she accepts the male hegemony which is mainly responsible for her unending agonies. She also supports the males in the orthodox society to exploit her female counterparts by discriminating between male and female children. This is not done voluntarily, the society and the culture in which the woman is reared is responsible for this preferential treatment. But this kind of conventional submissiveness is found missing in the woman of the literary world of Shobha De. The major concern of the novelist is woman whether she is rural urban or metropolitan female folk; she presents the issues that affect the female world in an interesting way. The woman of her fiction are not homogenous they are varied creatures. Some



of them are the women of the 21st centuries who, unlike their predecessors accept the male hegemony. Some are more self-conscious and are always ready to take arms against all forms of injustices. They are more assertive and never concede themselves to the exploitation of patriarchal society. All the female traits, their individualities, experiences, tribulations and attitude presented from the feministic point of view. Most of her female protagonists and characters belong to the modern world, which is marked with materialism. The main focus of her art is on the woman subjugation by the men and patriarchal social order which has been vanquishing women from the time immemorial. It does not mean that Shobha De's endeavour in highlighting women's cause is her only motive in writing, besides providing voices to the silenced entities she also sheds light on the existing circumstances like social and financial which play major role in woman's exploitation. She defends the volatile woman from all sorts of male attempts of subjugation and discrimination. The way she portrays women characters in her works, show that she wants to move away from the traditional stereotype images of woman who is confined to the household chores and male physical gratification. Her woman is modern; a militant who is never shy to fight against the injustices. She does not accept the traditional notions regarding the woman who is considered as frail and submissive towards the patriarchal societies. Her woman is an assertive and dominant who never loses optimism despite the male atrocities.

The novelist does not believe that woman will always remain a vanquished entity who persistently moans for her miseries and waits for the external help for ending her tribulations. This woman is not a subsidiary to male but an equal to her male counterpart. She is rebellious and instead of cursing her woes stands firm in the times of adversity. She also never hesitates to help her other exploited women folks. The novelist states that woman in the modern times is totally different from the woman of 19th century. This woman never lags behind the male as she is eager to enter into every avenue which was once considered as exclusive for men. Now besides doing her domestic work excellently, she also becomes successful in employment, fashion and entertainment sectors. She states:

In India we treat women strangely. We either worship them or we burn them. If that sounds like an extreme sentence so is our peculiar attitude. If images of Durga were found in some of the houses where daughter-in-law were sent up in flames for not having brought along a handsome dowry. (*Shooting from the Hip: Selected Writing*,3)

Discussing sex which was once considered as a taboo, this woman is active in this matter and joins hands with her male partner. It is the orthodox Indian social order which never allows the woman to talk about sex openly but woman now is in a mood to cross all the traditional boundaries that obstruct her. It is also true that there is marked difference between the issues of conventional and that of the metropolitan women. The women from country side although living in modern times does not experience that kind of freedom which is enjoyed by her urban counterpart. She does not get that kind of access to the outside world which is possible in case of the metropolitan female. As urban and city women are financially independent, they are comparatively not much affected by the male hegemony, whereas the women folk from rural areas and their dependence on the males for survival make their life more pitiable. So the literary world of Shobha De is marked with the presence of the financially



independent women who are not only conscious about their rights but also never compromise their dignity. Even the males think twice in making incursions on their respect, it is only because of the pecuniary independence that these women have, the female of the city enjoy every pleasures of life according to their will.

Like most of the modern female writers who contribute to the Indian writing in English Shobha De is a highly educated person, she is from the metropolitan culture where she never witnesses the unjust treatment meted to woman in her family. But the liberal atmosphere at home propelled her interest in the condition of other women. It is because of the excellent education and the diehard will to observe the happenings in the surroundings she succeeds in providing the much needed depth in her literary writing. She is a voracious reader and an avowed writer who touches various aspects of feminine world through newspapers, television shows and journalistic works. Her major works shed light on various issues like feminism, poverty, destitution, hunger, traditions and culture. She also focuses on the true nature of the clash between the traditions and modernity. Her major and earliest fictional work *Socialite Evening* present the stark realities in Indian households and the patriarchal societies wherein the life of woman becomes more pathetic because of the male perversity. She thoroughly presents the frustration of Indian woman because the treatment the male gives to his better half. Although the female protagonist of this work Karuna is a victim of her husband, she does not surrender to the misbehavior silently. Through the portrayal of this female character, the novelist makes a minute observation and presents the scary state of male- female relations even in the society which is considered as cultured and modern. There are many males in the society who make the life of women utterly miserable that the woman in spite of living with her so called dear ones become frustrated and lonely. It is the story of a girl from a middle class background whose father is a through orthodox and traditional person. He never allows like other hegemonic males the liberty and space to his daughter. The girl like any other modern girl is eager to enjoy the current materialistic and glamorous world. She joins the fashion industry in Bombay and cannot controls herself from the deceptions of this glittering world. Her father never likes her daughter in the field which is considered as notorious for obscenity, female exploitation and loose moral behavior through the conventional motions of decency and culture. It is her modeling endeavor which is strongly disapproved by her father shows the mentality of the males when they enjoy the girl's ramp walk but oppose their near ones for this career. It is this parental pressure result into frustration. Unlike the submissive traditional girls, Karuna fights back and never submits herself to her father's will. Even she does not bother about her ignorance towards her parent's decision regarding the choice of her career and future. Even she alone chooses her better half on her own and ties the nuptial knot with a prosperous entrepreneur from Bombay. This decision pushes her future into the dark dungeon. This becomes a fatal decision, through Karuna the reader realizes that the modern woman is able to decide her future and she never entertains others in deciding her future course of actions.

The dark chapter of her life begins as she finds the typical male attitude which was initially missing in this man. Her life becomes so miserable that she comes under the wider gulf of frustration from where there are least chances of exit. Through her accounts the novelist sheds light on the males who destroy the lives of women and initially succeed in concealing their real nature. As every girl has many expectations from her better half but the way Bunty treats Karuna she becomes totally disappointed. The sorry state of this woman presents the



level of exploitation of woman at the hands of their near and dear ones. Her husband never loves her and whatever the physical contacts they enjoy are only for the male satisfaction. The woman becomes an appendage and subsidiary to the male who never bothers about her wishes and aspirations. Everything that is associated with woman turns into secondary for him. This continuous callousness carries the woman towards frustration. The repentance on the part of Karuna suggests that woman despite of her devotion for the wellbeing of family, remains a perpetual insignificant entity for the males. Despite of her love, affection and care towards the family her husband does not bother to appreciate her devotion. The Indian social order is such that a man can enjoy his life by tormenting or ignoring the woman at home who gives everything for him and his family but a woman cannot imagine her existence without a male. The male be it her husband, father, brother or son. Such helplessness of woman is the outcome of the male as well as the societal attitude towards woman. the women like that of women of Shoba De's literary world who at first do everything for their family but when they realize that their devotion is one sided and will one day end into nothingness, they choose another path. They never hesitate to enter into such avenues which are traditionally barred for the fair sex. Her protagonists' insistence on joining the modeling industry despite of her parent's displeasure suggest that Shobha De's woman does not easily submit to the whims of the males, although this female behavior can be considered as immoral on the connotations of morality and culture. Her woman can't tolerate the agony of the disrupted relations for a longer time. She is unable to carry the burden expecting better relations in future. This woman is a thorough practical, she behaves like a male who may continue with his wife at home and also enjoys extramarital affair. Karuna's justifications of her relations with Bunty's friend suggest the major transformations that are taking place in female mentality.

Shobha De's another work *Strange Obsession* presents the realities of Indian countryside where agrarian population is tormented both by the natural disasters and human avarice. In this work the novelist focuses on the tribulations of farming communities through a couple i.e. Amrita and Teekha. Here the writer moves away from the feminist theme of *Socialite Evening* to the burning realities of destitution and poverty. The love of woman for her household and the home which she has to vacate because of her inability to pay the rent is aptly presented by the novelist. The human greed for money which never allows human being to take a compassionate view towards the poverty ridden people is a common picture in all over India. In her other works like *Sisters*, *Starry Nights* and *Second Thoughts* she highlights various issues like the clash between modernity and tradition, poverty male chauvinism, spirituality, history and human relations.

Conclusion :

In this way her novels sheds light on the modern woman who is not easily intimidated by the male dominated society. She is somewhat rebellious who strives to ape the male traits of being independent. Although the woman she never backs down and learns to live life on her own terms, she is strong, benevolent, compassionate as well as inventive and enterprising. She is the woman who has firm faith in individualism and cares those relations which are based on trust and mutual respect. Her woman is a woman of modern era who is not fettered by the traditional institutions like marriage and society.



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