

Shobhaa De's: Mind and Art

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Abstract: *The present paper 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 Gokhale, 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.*

Keywords: *Indian English Literature, Novelist, Mind, Art, Urban society, Theme, Diction, Style, Plot and climax.*

The Indian English Literature hiked up only in few decennaries and from then, many Indian writers exalted global reputation. Eminent feminist writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kamala Markandaya, Namita Gokhale, Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande and Shobhaa De has given Indian English Fiction a new apparent level and bestowed different style to patriarchal models. Feminism in Indian discourse is a byproduct of western ideologies in common and feminist thought in general. Feminist English Literature is an apparition of numerous colors and shades, conciliatory, eminent and raucous. The authors and the texts are remarkable milestones in literature in English across the world. Shobhaa De is a best seller novelist of eighteen books in Indian English Literature. She is well renowned author, socialite, celebrity, former beauty queen, model and a columnist of leading newspapers and magazines. She is a humanist rather than a feminist.

The present paper focuses on Shobhaa De's Mind and Art in the way dictated by the media. She has completed her schooling from Queen Mary School, Mumbai and graduated from St. Xavier's College Mumbai, with a degree of psychology. She is a passionate Mumbaikar and a hard worker in her life and Mumbai is the central character in her novels.

Her writings have always aggravated because of her comprehensiveness to set forth the life of urban society deeply but she forbid herself by declaring that it was important for her to introduce this glamorous imagery of a world to which very limited people know about it.

Flawlessness is the most coveted ideal in art. It does not come twinkling in the eye of the author; instead it comes after a steadfastness and growth. She has started writing fiction from the period of last two decades. Her novels *Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights, Snapshots, Sultry Days, Strange Obsession and Second Thoughts* are selling like hot cakes in India and abroad. Amarnath Prasad rightly mentions that; "True art is concerned with the presentation of neither absolute truth nor the exposure of facts and figures, it is eternal a different thing more internal than external, more aesthetic than perfect."¹

She is a feminist artist who pronounces herself to her art unfeigned and proved within incessantly. Her wish makes her uneasy to experiment with a number of themes and vice versa. Paul W. Robert in *The Toronto Review* rightly holds the view.

"Staggeringly beautiful, she's also touchingly humble about her work. Looking into her eyes, I saw loneliness, passion, fear, humor, uncertainty, anger, sorrow and enormous strength. Not at once but in succession, a reaction to circumstances- like a chameleon. Rarely I have encountered such windows into soul opened so finely. Emerges is what one reads in her work: enigmatic, straightforward, crude, erudite, girlish, wise and ultimately, contrived truth. She doesn't know how good a writer she is, why she is, so good a writer."²

Shobhaa De's mind is one of the most provocative and important area currently under probe as a researcher than a writer. It is the center of intelligence and is always in motion or process. Mind is defined as:

"The organized totality or system of all mental processes or psychic activities of an individual."³

She thinks every time and sets her intellectual into action. Her mind understands the sentiments of the readers of this bourgeois world, where a large number of human beings are rudely hungry for power, wealth and carnal

gratification. De differs from other writers in her preoccupation with the individual; her naïve realism of the inner world of sensibility- the ups and downs inside her mind. She pays attention to each and every aspect of each footstep and focuses attention to sharpen her mind. She meditates and practices to write accurately with her sharp mind. It gives her the gift of conscious knowledge and gives the whole picture to sketch. The more she concentrates the more she writes. She travels, observes movies, socializes and stays connected with people and lives her life full-fledged and gets ideas for writing. Her novels are with the key of *Roman`a clef* as she perceives the central image of the character and the novel follows. She possesses independence of mind which makes her a rebel. She has proved a great skillfulness in choosing and weaving a series of events that have shaped her mind and have contributed to her growth. Marriage to her is symbiotic relationship where one feeds on the other, depends on the other.

She mentions that she will write always, in one form or other, if she didn't write she would be paralyzed without a pen to wield. A day for her becomes good when she has written well. Her mind runs faster and her fingers keep up. Writing is sex to her – it distresses her, gives her enjoyment, to understand the world and other people. She dives deep into the immeasurable profoundness of the mind of the character and digs out the pearls and gems concealed under the surface. She observes the battlefield before in cursing the fray and accomplishes her strategy and plans. Shobhaa De remarks:

“I have always enjoyed playing voyeur.....watching people who interest me. Trying to figure out what makes them say what they say, act the way they act.”⁴

She has a potential to turn the readers on when observing her *avant-garde* art or reading her novels one finds wandering in a strange-land where strong feelings and sentiments reign supreme.

Art involves the creation of beautiful or significant things. It can also be understood as the reflection of an artist's soul. For an artist, their art will never let them be lonesome; their art will keep them company to the extreme part of their life. She creates an ambiance as much artistic as it is skillful. Her art moves us, stir us emotionally, gives jerks and jolts to the mind of the reader. Her seductive art tantalizes, titillates and touches the soul as well as the body of the reader. She has crafted all fine pieces of literature or metamorphic structures which remain present to haunt our mind long after finishing them. A complete rhythm is maintained by her in her writings. A reader doesn't stop in between while reading unless he reads it completely. She represents her thoughts with the beautiful colors of atrocious honesty. She has adopted a 'stream of consciousness' to describe a narrative method in modern fiction. Her jealous and passionate tone creates an environment and maintains the mood of the reader. M.K. Bhatnagar quotes that:

“Literature is the present content assumes the form of a quintessentially personal, idiosyncratic, even weird vision of life, provoking teasing, confusing, amusing or bewildering the reader in a playful, informal, knowing manner.”⁵

The central theme of De's novels is urban, metropolitan woman and her connection with the family and society, her afflict and tribulation, agitation and fever in a hostile atmosphere; her untiring effort to make an identity in a hypocritical and unsusceptible society. She seems to fling hot and cold, irony and innuendo on the ostentation and pretences of modern man. Climax of the novels are with happy endings and are significant.

Undoubtedly her novels are full of sexual portrayals. But they have never been furnished at the cost of art and beauty, aesthetician and other criteria of literature. The *Tribune* rightly observes:

“She slaughters macho males with vengeance and rattle-poisons her gender with disdain and disregard. She is Shobhaa De, and she is scintillating and straight. She is a ruthless writer with a ramrod of a pen, and a ranging urge to kill somebody. She demolishes reputation and civilizations, with effortless grace and one thing she doesn't stomach is hypocrisy of any kind. She wields a powerful camera, and she needs to keep shooting that way whether anyone likes to photograph or not.”⁶

She has helped to establish in literature the temper of Freudian doctrine. She estimates man as a sexual animal, and the power of sex as the quality of his well being. Shobhaa De probes that sex is not a taboo as an orthodox thinking. Freud has openly laid a highly revolutionary theory about sex. D.H. Lawrence even went to the degree of making sex a religion. Alka Pande and Sreemoyee are the authors of the same in India. Shobhaa De is well aware of the fact that in India and outside too the sex and erotic sells. She has added *masala* in almost every novel to increase her sale of novels. Sexuality in her work is meant to examine the reasons for character

development, their behaviors, temperaments and attitudes. Writer's bold expression of sex is clearly visible in *Snapshots*:

"We don't dismiss it, we don't find it dirty. Sex doesn't threaten us. I feel sorry for all you women hanging on so desperately to outdated ideas of purity, morality, chastity. It's pathetic."⁷

She has crafted her women in such a way that they are sexually liberated and use sex on their own terms and seek happiness from a man or from a woman. They didn't want to be dominated as an object or as a subordinate person. The steamy plots have held the winning formula for De.

De's use of language displays the real inclination in existing social life towards the disintegration of linguistic norms and it's a medium exhibiting the real colors of her characters. She uses the hypotactic style in which the temporal, logical and syntactic relations of the characters are expressed verbally. Her language of advertising and the socialite style reverse the rich assortment and magnitude that make distinct the civilization of India into inflated excessiveness of language into a composite profit oriented art of prose. She has used Hindi snippets like *Salwar Kameez*, *Bindi*, *Chappals*, *Linda ki bachchi*, *Ghazals*, *Haraamis*, *Panch-mukhi rudraksha*, *Chhodo*, *Arrey baba*, *Akshayji Bechare*, etc. as a figuratively language to mirror the hypocrisy, the quality and such other doubtful social acts of her phony characters. She handles her language beautifully to adjust or rather dramatize the ebb and flow of emotions to highlight the different layers of the unconscious or subconscious mind. She speaks her mind. In *Socialite evenings*, she has described Anjali as:

"She is very sophisticated; she dresses beautifully, and speaks diversely. Her voice was sort of throaty and sexy."⁸

She observes and perceives her character and put in all power asserts, to craft them. Her women characters are domineering bold, surefooted and assertive pragmatic in comparison to their male counterparts. Mikki in *Sisters* is very bold:

"Thank you for your advice, Ramankaka. I appreciate and value your words. But I'd like you to hear a few of mine now. I can't change my sex, unfortunately. That is the one thing all of you will have to accept."⁹

De has repeated the independence of women without adjusting her role as a householder. She lays emphasis on proper education of women and to become self sufficient before she can step forward for a meaningful reaction and abandons the parochial society without being labeled as a rebel. Shanta Krishnaswamy cited that:

"Her women characters try to strike a balance between institutional needs and intellectual aspiration. Deeply exhausted by this trapeze act, they are further bewildered when the existential absurdity of life is unmasked before them, when they face loneliness and lack of communication and communality and are brought to mental crisis when masculine and institutional pressures are added to exacerbate them further."¹⁰

As Shobhaa De posses independent mind she has created very interesting characters from the psychological point of view. She knows that humans are composed of good and bad qualities. In *Sultry Days* she has portrayed Deb as a psychologically, plausible and convincing character.

Males in her novels are dishonest, egoistic, untutored and hypocrites. Shobhaa De's art deals with neurotic people, amoral and unashamedly wrapped in their brawling enjoyment of life's pleasures in their shaky glitter world, and the novels stand up with whimsical descriptions of all sorts.

Her artistic style is her own, direct and forceful. It is the physiognomy of her mind. Her style of writing is clear and bare. She makes her intentions clear in her writings that her female characters are not going to be sensational, submissive and weak women of demeanors. It can be clearly justified from *Starry Nights* by the words of Asha Rani:

"All of you are just the same, but wait. I will show you. I will do to men what they try to do me. I will screw you all- beat you at your own game."¹¹

Her style lulls us away from cheap sentimentalism to the world of metaphorical structures. In her writing she writes with a force that seems to have come from within her. Her style is not subjective but objective. It forces the reader to think precisely the same thing as the author thought when she wrote them. The

diction that one comes across in her novels is usually tremendous, clear, and lucid and has a good impact on reader's mind. She uses punctuation marks to quote the dialogues of the characters.

The plots of the novels are extremely good, on-going, interesting and are artistic and are built on the realism with the help of colorful imagery and rising actions. She has used the literary technique Bildungsroman to develop and mature her characters and to achieve mastery over her artistic craft. Sometimes she repeats the names of the characters in her novels.

She is possessed by letter 'S'. It sounds her good and beneficial as her name 'Shobhaa'. All the titles of her name begin with same letter 'S'. Sometime her tone becomes outraged and sometimes it is formal. Sometimes it becomes sarcastic and mocks at the males while exposing the reality of their lives.

Summing up, one can say that Shobhaa De's mind is like an iceberg and is very sharp; her style is the countenance of her mind. She writes uniquely and unpredictable. She posses downrightness, disposition and determination. She takes risk and thrive challenges, like freshness and is not apprehensive of flunks. Her creating mind is curious that makes her life exciting and inspiring. Her work elicits to us a meaningful message of human values that a woman must not be subjugated and marginalized at the hands of the man and reminds us to be aware from deception and deliberate trickery going in the urban society.

Her pure art manifest the righteousness and shows the bare exposure of urban society no doubt; but she performed it through the medium of art and beauty, feeling and form. She is a professional art writer who urges the readers to know more. Her work of art is unique and unrepeatabe with symbolical representation. It is creative, cognitive and effective.

Her mind and art proves that Shobhaa De is a strong individual, a versatile genius of highest order an opinion shaper of the country and Queen of Indian English fiction.

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