

Chapter – V

Conclusion

Feminism is a socio-political movement which advocates involved active participation by women to demand for their rights. It can be considered a movement which is fought against female oppression under patriarchy. There are various ways by which a woman can be victimized. Among them, it being the most common, the victimization of a woman takes place with a view to boosting one's caste, colour, race, attitude towards motherhood, etc. The Feminist movement was actually started by the white women themselves who basically hailed from the middle class in Western Europe and North America. This trend got accelerated in 1960's with Cool Right Movement and the collapse of European Colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean parts of Latin America and South Asia.

The Third Wave feminists advocate equal rights for the girls by taking charge of their own sexual fulfillment. In her essay, "Lusting for Freedom", Rebecca Walker discusses the need for sex education for young women. According to her, "Women and men both must learn to explore sexuality by making love in ways that are different from what we see on television and in the movies". (24) The essay recognizes that sexual pleasure is a central part of women's lives and does not discourage women

who know how to achieve it without any sense of guilt or regret.

In the words of Rebecca:

Without being able to respond and honour the desires of our bodies and our selves, we become cut off from our instincts for pleasure, dissatisfied living under rules and thoughts that are not our own. When we deny ourselves safe and shameless exploration and access to reliable information, we damage our ability to even know what sexual pleasure feels or looks like (23).

The new generation of feminism embraces beauty and the power of women's sexuality to achieve their needs. They consider sexual pleasure a human right. Many writers in India have talked of pleasure and its manifestations.

The heroines in Ms. De's novels rebuild their lost fortunes; make all efforts to look glamorous by losing weight and spending money in massage parlours. They try to look and act differently from the conventional and traditional women. They are keen to fall in love with their looks by which they try to attract people. It gives them immense pleasure when they fall head to heels in love with their partners. They are least concerned about what they are doing. Shobha De does not believe in describing her women characters as love slaves or mere helpmates at home. Shobha De as a writer tries to portray her feminist mindset while sketching

women in her novels. A broader evaluation of her work reveals her protest against the good old image of women who cannot live the way they want to and do things the way as they please. Women in her novels are represented as sexually liberated and free thinkers. They have been termed as the type with the label "New Women". These so-called new women are much more physically active and athletically stronger than their mothers. *Feminist-New Style*, a journal (1927) declared that "The new woman is a blend of physical freedom, sexuality and stamina with feminist self assertiveness and traditional domestic femininity, a woman who can combine pleasure, career and marriage. They are eager to participate in pleasure as they would do in play, work etc." (7)

Shobha De has explored imaginatively the varied world of women characters in her popular fiction. She emphasizes the quest for meaning of life, identity and unfulfilled emotional life of the characters through her novels. The aim of this research work, therefore, is to provide certain clues for a better understanding of women characters in her novels. It is a modest attempt to study De's women characters in the light of their domestic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Being a woman De is more aware of the predicaments of women. She presents the vital reality and makes us aware of the miseries of women and

injustice done to them by their counterparts in the patriarchal society. As a result, the women in her novels appear as life-like human beings.

However, it is an important assertion that though De's novels such as *Starry Nights*, *Sultry Days*, *Snapshots* etc. are crowded with female characters, the analysis of the novels clearly indicates that her focus is only on the women protagonists, and the other secondary female characters are there to provide them support. Furthermore, her novels move around only the metropolitan women whereas rural women do not find place in her novels. They are totally ignored. As a matter of fact, Shobha De restricts her characters to the urban area, ignoring the life of the ordinary, illiterate rural Indian women. In this context, her remarks regarding the inspiration behind her novels are of considerable importance. For instance, she points out that her portrayal of the fashionable life in *Socialite Evenings* is an accurate exposure of Mumbai "High Society" (330). Similarly, she says that her second novel *Starry Nights* "is the accumulation of countless images and memories gathered during my Stardust period" (331). About the portrayal of life in Bollywood De (1998: 332) further says :

The grime 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 had 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.

This is probably the reason why she has used an obscene language and sex scenes which created a great stir among the readers when the novel was published. It is for the first time in the history of Indian writing in English that the novelist adopts bitter and contemptuous tone to expose the filthy world in an unusual manner. She has presented the truth as she saw it and in the only way it can be expressed. Similar are the situations that inspired the rest of her novels. She has created the imaginative reconstruction of sordid reality which she has observed in big metropolises and which makes her fictional world authentic.

Shobha De is one of the famous feminist writers of the modern era. In her works there is a bold and frank depiction of the fair sex and their attitude. Her novels can be termed as the ‘protest’ novels against the male-dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom of expression and action

according to their will. In such society they could not cherish and fulfil their own dreams. A woman, like man, is born to be free but in reality everywhere she is controlled by many man-made norms and factors victimizing and subjugating her in many ways.

This control restricts her essential free spirit and makes her ready for a rebellion. This is reflected in her portrayal of her female characters such as Karuna, Aasha Rani, Maya and Mikki Hiralal, who are the victims of marital disharmony. Karuna is a prominent Mumbai socialite, Aasha Rani is a film star – ‘Sweetheart of millions’, Maya is qualified as a Textile Engineer and Mikki Hiralal is the daughter of an industrialist, but they all are deprived of marital joys. Their parents are indifferent to them in their childhood and their husbands ignore their emotional needs. Their miserable situations pose a great threat to their survival. In partial wish-fulfilment, some of them establish extra-marital relationships, some accept singlehood as a way of life whereas the others accept the mode of compromise. Their growth as individuals is obstructed. Maya of *Second Thoughts* is so handicapped by domestic tension that she is made incapable of reaching out to the wider world due to domestic hurdles. The dark domestic atmosphere suffocates her.

The women characters who dominate the fictional world of Shobha De are highly modern. They lead luxurious, uninhibited and glamorous life. They are economically independent and free from social and moral restrictions. But the patriarchal way of life in the form of male hegemony and masculine superiority play a very significant role in the subjugation and marginalization of these women. The women like Karuna, Mikki, Maya, Alisha and the others do not suffer due to any social or moral conflicts. Instead, the cause of their suffering and frustration lies in the self-absorbing, tyrannical and non-responsive attitude of their male counterparts. In fact, it is due to their bitter experiences there is transformation on the part of women like Karuna, Aasha Rani, Mikki Hiralal, Meenakshi Iyengar and the others. Their painful existence forms the major part of De's novels, but her ultimate consideration is to show these women's indomitable courage to fight against all odds. The very course of these women's search for an independent and autonomous identity indicates their final failure to have a controlling position, yet they do not feel helpless. Unlike the traditional women, De's women never think of taking recourse to suicide to free themselves from their sufferings. On the contrary, they continue to register their anger and protest against the male dominance. As a result of their oppression, exploitation and marginalization,

they turn rebellious. Moreover, their antagonistic attitude towards men makes them outspoken, bold, somewhat arrogant and unbelievably aggressive.

Shobha De depicts the warring pairs of women and throws a significant light on women's indulgence in individual happiness and selfish pleasures. She brings out the psychological truth that woman is the enemy of woman. In *Starry Nights*, for example, Aasha Rani's sister Sudha Rani turns against her in order to snatch away her position in the world of Showbiz. Similarly, the novel *Sisters* is a story of two warring sisters Mikki and Alisha. In *Snapshots* also the six women who get together to share their experiences finally show their distrust and fight against each other and one another. Here the novelist also highlights the degradation and lack of moral values in the contemporary society. This is reflected in the modern women's decision not to have children because they look at them as a lifelong responsibility. Their life is characterized by adultery, uninhibited sex, marital infidelity, business rivalries and lust for money. All these selfish and mean motives reveal their true mettle and emotional make-up. However, the reading of such novels makes us probe into the question why these women characters follow meaningless ways of living. Furthermore, it shatters the bubble of 'standard life'.

Being a very bold and aggressive writer of the post-modern era, Shobha De has dared to explore the hidden realities of the cosmopolitan life. She challenges the age-old traditional beliefs in her works. In fact, her popularity as a writer chiefly rests on her intimate understanding of the psyche of the woman and her problems. Her treatment of the contemporary urban woman's position and the challenges she faces is significant. Traditionally man has been regarded as a protector, a master and a guardian of woman. The very relationship between man and woman, evolved through centuries is based on a set pattern, it means man to rule and woman to obey, man, the master, and woman, the slave, man, the god and woman, the devout, man for the field and woman for the hearth. This centuries-old, mutely followed relationship has now been challenged by the modern educated woman. She has realized that now she is not as helpless and dependent as a child. Instead, she is as much competent as man. There is a tremendous change in her psyche. The women characters in Shobha De's novels evince this transformation because they are no more passive and submissive protagonists accepting all the burden of the family mutely. They have realized their strength; so, despite facing dire problems, they overcome them on their own. Again due to social conflict and ideological struggle, the role of woman in society has been continuously

changing. Consequently, the sexual ways and social codes prevalent in the society are greatly influenced and the same is incorporated by Shobha De in her fictional world. Her women characters are no more love-addicts or mere helpmates at home. They are more remarkable than men. They work and move around like their male counterparts. They try to demolish the myth that the activities of women are essentially limited to certain spheres of life. Some of them have active participation in trade, commerce, industry, creative writing and socio-political affairs. They work hand in hand with the male-community. These women enter into the fields dominated by men and are shown playing different roles other than those traditionally assigned to them. In *Starry Nights*, for example, Aasha Rani succeeds in becoming a movie star, Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* opts for a life out of marriage as a creative writer, in *Strange Obsession* Meenakshi Iyengar is a lesbian and Amrita is a model, and in *Sisters* Mikki takes over the control of Hiralal Industries. Similarly, most of the other women in De's novels are associated with Showbiz. Only in *Second Thoughts* we find Maya dependent on her husband. The man-woman relationship is presented as almost hollow, ineffectual and compromising, resulting in the shattered man-woman image. But even then, the woman needs the companionship of a man in order to satisfy her natural urge.

So, De's daring women establish extra-marital relations in order to get rid of their rigid and orthodox marital framework. These women are not hesitant in using sex as a calculated strategy to gain social and financial benefits. They easily outplay their male counterparts with a better control in their attitude, desire and expression.

Shobha De's women struggle to find certain ways in order to make their protest effective, their presence felt, and to save them from complete surrender and silence. In spite of this, these women fail to win a respectable position in the society. But their failure is not due to some inner flaw in them. Instead, it is the result of the superiority claimed by men and mindset of the people due to the prevalence of patriarchy.

Until the sixties and seventies man alone was looked upon as bread winner and woman was confined only to household work. Since time immemorial the Indian woman has lived under the protection either of parents or husband or her own children. This pattern outwardly has made her life safe and smooth, but actually slavish and dependent. In the modern era, however, a woman too has become a direct money-earner, shouldering her household duties. The new education has awakened her real self. As a result, she has started thinking of independent and self-reliant life. And in order to translate this thinking into

reality, she has started fighting against her own timid self as well as man's protectoral shell. No doubt, the fight is tough but it has set in. De's women characters are trying to regain self-confidence and self-respect. To some extent, they are aware about their changed roles and responsibilities. Perhaps, her novels will encourage a majority of women to shoulder confidently their changed roles but without breaking social equilibrium. Certainly, they will take precaution to maintain harmony in man-woman relationship catering for values and ethics of Indian cultural heritage.

In India the struggle for woman's equality with man has found expression in the novels written especially in the last couple of decades. The second generation Indian women novelists like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Shashi Deshpande have challenged the male culture that prevails in our country. But the early soft voices of protest gradually turned into an open rebellion in the art of Shobha De. Broadly speaking, Indian fiction in English depicts three kinds of women : first the poor women, belonging mostly to the rural area, portrayed by the writers like Kamala Markandaya, Jai Nimbkar and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. Secondly, the middle-class women, especially the educated and employed are depicted by the writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi

Deshpande and thirdly, the neo-rich aristocrat women depicted by the writers like Namita Gokhale, Bharati Mukherjee and Shobha De. Like Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De concentrates on the problems of women and gives a new approach to them. She has recognized the sad plight, displacement and marginalization of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down through her writings. However, she explores only the world of urban women in India. She claims to be among the first to explore the world of cosmopolitan women.

Shobha De's novels indicate the emergence of a new woman curious to revolt against the traditional moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. Her novels represent the new Indian Woman's Voice. A 'New Woman' is in search of self-identity, seeking liberation in all walks of life, replacing the traditional image of the Indian woman. A comprehensive evaluation of De's novels makes clear her protest against the established image of woman as an auxiliary. She tries forcefully to undo this distorted image of woman who cries for freedom and equality which is still an unheard melody in the patriarchal world. From this point of view, the women depicted in her novels are more powerful than men. They represent an authentic picture of the modern Indian women. They are sexually liberated.

Shobha De portrays the bifurcation between “He” and the “Other”. She challenges the traditional definition of morality and projects the image of the modern woman as self-reliant, free-thinking and having a new code of morality like the western women. She is a staunch supporter and an ardent follower of feminism. Hence, her woman should regard herself as the ‘self’ and face the challenges in life in the days of globalization.

Shobha De realistically presents in her fiction the models of different types of women. The characteristics of the New Woman as defined are well justified in the fictional world of Shobha De. Her fiction has proved its worth by being authentic to the changes taking place in the society at the end of the millennium. Shobha De opines that with the changing scenario, there is need on the part of women to seek their identity.

Shobha De’s descriptions of sexual activities mark the beginning of the sexual revolution. It is due to this she is labelled as a pornographic writer. It is true that these descriptions of sex acts are violently attacked by various academicians. But these details gain importance in the light of the feminist ideas related to the rejection and abolition of oppressive norms of patriarchy. Hence, to replace the patriarchal way of life Charvet John (1982: 123) rightly says:

"The overthrow of patriarchy requires a complete sexual revolution which would destroy the traditional taboos on homosexuality, bastardy, adolescent and pre-and extra-marital sex- in other words there should be unrestricted sexual activity of all kinds."

Further, to point out the significance of pornographic elements in Shobha De's novels S. P. Swain (1999:37) observes : "Pornography in Shobha's novels becomes a symptom and symbol of the female's defiance of a male regulated female sexuality." In order to challenge the oppressive gender roles these women turn to deviant and uncommon sexual practices. For example, De creates new generation of 'lusty', 'wild' and 'wandering' women protagonists like Karuna, Aasha Rani, Meenakshi Iyengar, Alisha, Swati, Aparna and others who explore new avenues in female sexuality. They struggle against male hegemony and supremacy of men. But patriarchy plays the role of a major enemy of women's freedom. This is evident in *Socialite Evenings* where the alternative suggested to assure woman's independence is singlehood. But this alternative doesn't look convincing as the only remedy for woman's problems. Here Shobha De indicates that the woman may consider leading a life of singlehood but the subsequent isolation and loneliness will be its natural outcome.

There are varied ways of protest of women. They reject all the traditionally established patterns of behaviour. They concentrate on gaining power in man-woman relationship. De creates alternative female identity, where a woman sometimes takes the role of man and another takes the role of a 'Free Woman'.

In the process of exploration of the aspects of feminist position, Shobha De exposes the women's misunderstanding regarding their freedom and mocks at their way of asserting their individuality by posing to be men without concentrating on the female empowerment as a whole. Her women protagonists like Karuna, Mikki, and the young women like Anjali, Ritu, Alisha, Sudha Rani, Amrita, Swati, Surekha, Aparna and Reema practice free sex. They fail to understand that their sexual freedom is being used and abused by men. The novelist suggests through these women characters that, whenever women whether circumstantially or ambitiously disregard morality in the name of their struggle for success in life, they cannot escape disaster and consequent suffering.

Twentieth century marks the emergence of many women writers on the Indian literary scene. Though the long silence is broken and women express their anguish, the picture is still grim. Although the women wish to take a bold step, they feel a

sense of guilt if they break the established norms. For instance, Malini in *Starry Nights* in preference to her husband, children and family, gives up her career as a *gazal* singer. Maya in *Second Thoughts*, complies with the traditional norms. Naturally very limited freedom is granted to such women. Sooner or later they learn to adjust, as there is no other alternative, if they need to live a respectful life. Maya, too accepts to remain enveloped in the loneliness and sadness of her life. On second thoughts, she learns to survive the sultriness of not only Mumbai, but also of her marriage. This clearly shows that the reality hidden behind the glamorous and glittering life of the modern women is extremely bitter because after the temporary glamour vanishes, they have to learn to live with the stark realities of life.

All her heroines, be it Karuna, Aparna, Mikki , Alisha or Asha Rani are rebellious modern Indian women who challenge the orthodoxy of social taboos. They are different from the sexually ignorant Indian woman which is quite contradictory to most Indian male writers who feel that sex is an unpleasant subjection to man's desire- necessary in order to have offspring. Shobha De's women challenge this traditional set up in the society. Her women are far more assertive, domineering and bold in comparison to men. They are not submissive, and guilty of their affairs.

Sujata, in *Sultry Days* is a prostitute, who does what her mind says. This gives her pleasure. Life is defined on her own terms. When Asha Rani, in *Starry Nights* the famous heroine of Bollywood decides to quit films all of a sudden when she is at the peak of her career just to live with a fellow co star, Akshay Arra, her mother tries to dissuade her from doing it. Then she argues in this way in “Money, money, money. That’s all you think of. Well, I’m fed up being your money machine. I’ve done enough for everybody- you, Sudha and others- now I want to live for myself.”(106)

Asha Rani designs a code of conduct for herself which is free from the prescribed gender rules and sexual constraints. This shows clearly that women in Shobha De’s novels can’t be always taken for granted that they will be dutiful and self sacrificing daughter to their parents. They will certainly revolt when their self-interest is at stake. They may face hurdles but they are smart enough to ignore them and break these hurdles very skillfully and tactfully and emerge out of it comfortably.

The novelist has portrayed her women characters in such a way that the readers get a clear picture of her intentions. She has tried her best to expose the normal and spiritual break down of the society which she thinks is in helpless state. Therefore she has understood the human psyche which has made her take a

thorough look at the age old customs which bars a woman from doing certain things which she likes to do but is unable to because of the rigid bonds she is bounded with.

Women in upper class society have no concern about public. The concept of morality arising out of love for one and the same person is considered to be outdated. The women in Shobha De's novels believe in breaking the age old traditions of enjoying life with pre- marital affairs and extra- marital affairs. She takes a plunge extra into the hearts of the liberated upper class women in contemporary Indian society.

Sex and sensuality are a part of life and in order to accept life one has to affirm sensuality. A woman doesn't consider faithfulness and love a virtue while seeking pleasure. Shobha De's depicts women in their true colours. They are portrayed as what they actually are and not what they should have been. Therefore real pleasure is defined differently for different people. It may mean erotic sex for some women while it may be soft touch and sensual love making as described between Mikki and her husband Binny Malhotra on the moonlit night in his place before their marriage.

The new concept of pleasure envisages complete sexual freedom which is accompanied by economic freedom; uncontrolled passion is sought by Shobha 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 does not raise eye brows to those men who leave their wife at home and enjoy with prostitutes. 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 it is 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.

Rigorous taboos of our society forbid women to have any sort of sexual liaisons by breaking the rigid laws of matrimony in India. However women in Shobha De's novels are broad minded enough to continue with their flings and affairs without bothering about the matrimonial alliance of their partners. These women are confident and are reasonable enough to justify their relationship. This relationship is best exhibited in the relationship between Asha Rani and Akshay Arora in *Starry Nights*.

The heroines are not ready to obey the superficial social rules which are made by men. Shobha De's women dare to move around and seek pleasure with anyone they like to overcome their mental fatigue. The general norm stated by the society for a woman is to show herself as an active participant in sexual alliance. She is taught not to exhibit her sexual appetite and to participate boldly in sensual activities. Under this servile position, she does not have to express her sexual urge which is considered to be against the social taboos. Shobha De's women frame their own culture by breaking these social norms of the society. While writing about women, she does not have to be unrealistic because she involves herself completely while writing novels and portraying her women as various characters which she could not have realized if she had written about male characters.

Shobha De's women have found various ways of seeking pleasure and they do not hesitate to design their own attitude and behavior which may vary from their counterparts. They are mostly urban women who give less or no importance to the morality and spirituality. They want to be free from the established gender roles and sexual restraints of the traditional society. They want to enjoy the same rights as men. Men regard their women as commodities that can be bought or sold at their

own terms and conditions, make women dance to their tunes, and mould them in the concept of traditional servility and make them stand meekly and suffer emotionally, thus women are made to suffer and they have to strive hard to discover the human in them.

Sex contributes a lot in providing pleasure to the women in Shobha De's novels. The writer feels that sex should not be despised or something to be afraid of. She has spoken about the beauty of sex and the change it brings in to the lives of men and women. She has spoken about sex in the following way in *Snapshots*: "Sex is no longer the most dreaded and despised three letter word in India, is enough to celebrate."(3)

In the urban world a modern woman tries to do anything that comes to her mind, goes to any extent to derive pleasure of her own. The best example of it can be found in the novel *Starry Nights*, where the heartthrob of millions, queen of Bollywood, Asha Rani tries to derive pleasure in destroying men and the most dreaded weapon that she uses is "Bed". Men are unable to forget her once she goes to bed with them. Her bed mates ranged from Kishen bhai, to Akshay Arora to Abhijit, to Jay to Jojo and she even got succeeded to seduce her father's friend in a plane. Sometimes men got afraid of her spell yet they could not resist going to her for pleasure and once they went, they were trapped.

Asha Rani loved to destroy them, According to her, bed can be considered as a battle field where the battle goes between two human bodies and it's a battle of intellectual ones.

Asha Rani won each time this battle was fought. Men hated her, despised her yet had a desire for her. This battle field gave Asha Rani sensual pleasure and she loved it very much. She is compared to a gangster who is a very pretty woman in the battlefield which is considered to be the bed. Asha Rani's game strategy is that she would first of all judge her enemy's qualities and she had expertise in it. After that when she goes to bed with him, she uses all the tricks that would make him loose out to him and thus giving her all the pleasure in the world.

Asha Rani's source of enjoyment were men and the game she enjoyed playing is love making. Age was not at all a bar for love making. She had sexual encounters with men of his father's age and men who were young enough to be her son like Amar who was a very young and promising star and in fact she had taken a liking for him instantly after meeting him for the first time when they were together for a movie. She had even recommended his name to the directors to cast him opposite her. To say that he was so desperate to continue with an incomplete scene of their movie in this way in *Starry Nights*: "Look, remember, that scene in our movie- where the director cut to a

bolt of lightning just when our lips were to meet? I'm like suffering from continuity problem. Could I.....that is..." (29) It was Amar who wished her on her birthday when she was thinking about Akshay as he did not wished her at all. When he called her up and requested to come over and spend the night with her, she immediately agrees to his proposal and welcomes him by wearing a small and youthful T- shirt and tried to be seducing enough by tugging the neck of her costume off one shoulder. Finally they ended up with a sensual love making in her bed room. This has proved a point that the women in Shobha De's novels have made it very clear that they wish to enjoy their life like men without any interference.

Shobha De has tried to portray a man woman relationship which may be very serious yet they can give pleasure to the heroine at the same time. Not only this during the love making sometimes its men who ask them not to stop and deprive them of the pleasure It was Asha Rani who initiated the love making when she was with Akshay and she used various tricks to arouse him and give him pleasure which always culminated in sexual satisfaction and she succeeded in doing it always because after the love making process, Akshay was a contended man.

The traditional Indian woman tries to adjust her nature with her man but it's just the opposite with Shobha De's women.

They are independent and free from social and moral restriction. Asha Rani knew that Akshay was married with two sons and was a family man yet she did not think of sparing him from seducing him and the writer has left no stone unturned to depict the very warm and intimate love making scenes between Asha Rani and Akshay Arora. Asha Rani found pleasure in the company of Akshay. She had cancelled all the shooting schedules to be with him on his birthday and they celebrated his birthday very sensually in his holiday inn. The person she remembered most was on her birthday was Akshay Arora. Not only that, Asha Rani was so desperate about the physical intimacy with him that even the abuses by his wife, public insult did not bother him.

The only thing that mattered to her was Akshay and being in bed with him. She always waited for opportunity to win him back into her life. She finally got a chance in the monsoon when she was going for shooting and met Akshay in the traffic. He was persuaded and she succeeded and what followed next was a quiet love making in his Holiday inn in *Starry Nights*, “Their love making was different. No biting, clawing or frenzied passion. Akshay was gentle and unfrenzied. Asha Rani did not feel much like a tigress herself. They hardly spoke.” (102)

The women in Shobha De's novels do not reject female sexuality. Rather they exhibit different attitude towards sex to contest the established views about the generally and taken for granted view of the human sexual behavior. It makes these women reject the strict social environment that makes the women actually conscious of every small pleasure which may be emotional or physical. It is a very common feature in Shobha De's novels that almost all of the women experience sex with more than one person. Their rejection of sexual morality forms a part of their challenge to the patriarchal way of life that introduces certain curbs on women's behavior.

These women's indulgence in deviant sexual behavior, their attitude towards sexual morality and their use of inhibited language form a kind of protest against patriarchal system. The women seem to support the radical feminist proposal of replacing the patriarchal way of life. Dominance over the patriarchal system in our society gives rise to sexual revolution which has resulted in making the women bold, wild and lusty. Their activities and thoughts show their belief that a radical change is necessary to make the present system congenial for women and give some space of existence to women. Shobha De's women characters are very frank about their expression of sexual desire by snubbing the sexual morality which is

essentially ordained for women in the patriarchal system existing in India. Their reference to the sexual act in unambiguous terms shatters the traditional image of women that presents her as a submissive, docile, calm and meek.

The writer's bold expression regarding sex is clearly visible from the following lines of *Snapshots*: "We don't dismiss it. We don't find it dirty. Sex doesn't threaten us. I'm not afraid to fuck. I feel sorry for all you women hanging on so desperately to outdated ideas of purity, morality, chastity. It's pathetic." (226) Sometimes Shobha De has been charged of commercializing women while expressing sex in a much elaborated detail but what one can feel after reading her novels is that she has tried to fight for the cause of women and has brought out the aspect of sex because she feels that women are marginalized even in terms of sex. They are made slaves in the hands of their husbands by making them satisfy their demands whenever they need it. They get cruel and rude even in love making and get enjoyment out of it. Shobha De has portrayed men deriving pleasure by torturing a woman by beating their naked body with hunters or hurting them with making bruises and giving them pain. Therefore the writer has portrayed her women in such a way that they are sexually liberated and use sex on their own terms.

In the novel *Sisters*, Shobha De has mentioned that women can make men give them what they want. For example in the following lines she has talked about the joy which a newly wedded wife should feel when she is with her husband:

.....His expertise and imagination were boundless as he excited her in a hundred different ways, touching, licking, nibbling, sucking..... he turned her over, he stood her up, he had her on all fours, and he even had her upside down with blood rushing in a gush into her head. It was unreal, pleasurable, but also a little frightening. (174)

Shobha De has mentioned that a woman can get pleasure even when she is surrendering to a man against her wishes. She enjoys with her protests like the following description in *Sisters*:

Mikki did not have time to do anything but savour the myriad physical sensations sweeping over her pliant body as she surrendered to this man who was now her husband. There was no resistance left. And she was happy. And they had broken all the rules and every taboo that she had ever known. She felt liberated, uninhibited and aroused to the point of primitive abandon. (175)

Shobha De has shown in her novels that a woman can be a seeker of pleasure simultaneously. They want it in various ways and the man who gives them using different tricks is very much

admired by them. They love these men and can do anything for them. After Mikki got the sexual satisfaction from her husband before marriage, she immediately got married to him without giving second thoughts to her decision.

Contradicting the myth that women should meekly obey their husbands during the love making process, Shobha De's women are aggressive and sometimes become sexually violent to destabilize the idea of male domination. Therefore one can say that the concept of pleasure for Shobha De is complete sexual freedom with no intention of fidelity. Her women love to experience pre marital sexual encounters, post marital affairs and love to explore the forbidden areas which is defined by the rigid norms of the society.

In her novel *Second Thoughts*, Shobha de has tried to make a point that a woman who is reduced to a lifeless body, mentally tortured by her husband, has no right to spoil her life. She gave her heroine a new dimension by introducing her with another man who could fill her life with colors of joy and give her the pleasure which she was so desperate for. Maya was a very attractive young girl from Kolkata who came to Bombay after getting married to Ranjan who is a bank executive. Ranjan took no interest in her as a woman and had never cared for her interests. He never tried to find out the reason behind Maya's

gloominess. He was under the assumption that providing four square meals was more than enough for her and she ought to be grateful for what he was doing for her. Even when Maya made advances to him in bed, he snubbed by saying that he needed time for it.

The entry of Nikhil brought a new meaning to Maya's life. He was a fourth floor neighbor and was a college going student. He may not be interested in studies but he had mastered the art of captivating women. Maya could immediately feel the difference Nikhil brought to her life. Once when he said that she looked fresh and beautiful in blue sari, she started wearing more and more of blue coloured sari. His presence itself brought joy which came from within the heart. She started taking care about her makeup, wore fresh saris, combed and tidied up her hair and neatly put sindoor on the parting of her forehead and tried to look beautiful everyday anticipating his arrival anytime. She was bowled over in their first encounter when he tried to look into his eyes and smiled. She says in *Second Thoughts*: "But Nikhil most definitely affected me and one part of me did not approve. This was ridiculous – a newly married woman day dreaming about a neighbour's young son."(45) Pangs of conscience gives way to the sublime urges of the soul in this novel. Extramarital affairs are regarded with more understanding and flexibility. If a woman

gets pleasure out of it, she does not hesitate in enjoying it. She thinks it to be a ventilator which provides air of sustenance to a soul that is being suffocated in an unhappy surrounding called fate.

Maya is very much aware that Nikhil is the other man in her life. She also knows that by accepting his offer of friendship it would be an act of violation of social and moral code. One day when Ranjan, her husband was on a ten day official tour, Maya got the opportunity to go on an outing with Nikhil to Malabar hills in his motor bike. She allowed herself to be enjoyed and loved in the company of Nikhil where she felt the beauty and pleasure in her life. She admits in this way, "I was ready to jump on Nikhil's motorbike and say "goodbye" to my uninspiring life without the slightest regret. The choice was frighteningly mine."(241)

Finally the love making scene depicted by Shobha De between Maya and Nikhil is described as the heights of pleasure experienced by Maya. It was described as smooth, gentle and painless. One day Nikhil came to her house and announced it was his birthday and without giving any chance to Maya to react, he embraced her and the writer has written in elaborate details what followed after this in this way: "But Nikhil's mouth

covered mine gently. His eyes were shut and his hands were in my untidy hair with the bouquet getting caught in the tangles"(374). The kiss between Maya and Nikhil is described by Maya as so complete and focused in the following way, "It was a kiss that involved Nikhil's entire being. A kiss so focused, so complete. I surrendered to its soft urgency even though my mind was on mundanities like the washerwoman showing up earlier than usual." (376-77)

Maya has described these moments as the most wonderful, the most unimaginable and moving experience of her life. Nikhil filled Maya with the power and pleasure that she was so much desperate about. She had found meaning in her existence in this world. "Nikhil had mastered the art of love making and was very composed and well acquainted with the Physical needs of a woman and to give her the pleasure."(379)

Shobha De's novel *Snapshots* also has depicted about a woman's needs, desires and pleasures. This novel too has emphasized the fact that sexual pleasure is a very important need for a woman. Shobha De's women characters in this novel speak about different aspects of love, sex and life. The reader can know about the writer's intention from the very first sentence, "Prem liked to make love in public places" which gives the reader the impression of pleasure from the view of a woman.

The women in *Snapshots* want to enjoy life and give in easily to sex which shows the women's weakness for sex and their sexual enjoyment in life. Talking about sex and participating about sex oriented conversation gives them immense pleasure. That seems to be the only topic of discussion when women are in the company of women. Swati, one of the seven women friends in *Snapshots* loves to be in the company of girl friends or otherwise prefers to be alone though she also loves sex and is a hard core seeker of pleasure by using men. The anger against men and the male-dominated society and the relief of being alone in the absence of men make these women free to enjoy life without any strings attached to them. Shobha De has tried to emphasize this point by describing a scene in *Snapshots* where she has displayed her imaginative skill. When the women were enjoying a get together in Reema's home and suddenly they wanted to discuss on a particular topic, Swati announces that "nobody is watching". Since enjoyment of life is the prime motive of these elite class women, they try to voice against the traditional norms of the society and the joint family system. The women are very assertive and want to do two things at a time. That means they want to ask the mother-in law to stay away from their ways and at the same time, they want their husbands to do what they want him to do.

Shobha De has portrayed many forbidden relationships in *Snapshots* which were established just for pleasure. The very common relationship is about Reema's relationship with her brother-in-law who was in America. They had a sort of arrangement that whenever Randhir, (Reema's brother-in-law) came to India, Reema would be engaged with him and provide him with all the sexual pleasure. This affair was completely unknown to her husband. She herself confessed this to her friends that she was not in love with Randhir. Their love making portrayed by Shobha De clearly indicates that it was pleasure and nothing else. Both are pretty free with each other.

Randhir criticizes her for being a typical Indian wife like this:

Relax woman, I'm not the first man to do it to you surely. Reema shut her eyes and put her arms around Randhir. The feel of his smooth bare back under her fingers made her tingle all over and she felt her body unwinding gradually. She moved her hips, shyly at first, and then with a rhythm that was aggressive and insistent. She arched herself to receive him better, her breasts straining to make contact with the rough hairs on his chest. Soon the bodies were moving together perfectly synchronized and she could hear Randhir grunting in deep arousal as he drove himself

harder, locked into a double embrace created by her arms and legs as she held him firmly, passionately to herself as if afraid of letting go. (158)

They have opined that sex is a hobby which gives pleasure to her. These people feel happy when their husbands are not around and come late from office like Reema says:

Yes, it rather suits me. We have hardly anything to talk about. This way I have the whole day free for myself. I go to the Priyadarshini park every evening for a long walk. Then I come home and chat on the phone. We plan out our kitty lunches, shopping trips for the next day. What to make for dinner. Holiday plans. It's much better this way. He's so tired at night. He finishes his dinner in ten minutes and goes to sleep. On days when I want to watch movies or read, I sleep in the next room. (228-9)

Sexual expressions, physical intimacy have been maintained as befitting background for an in depth analysis of the modern Indian society in which a woman always finds herself at the receiving end. Sometimes men seek pleasure from a prostitute where a woman is commercialized. However Shobha De's novels make the reader analyze that a woman who sells her body for money is a giver of pleasure to a man like Swati, who commodifies her body in the name of sexual autonomy. She is

used by the men made object of physical desire and represents the hundreds of women who want to become famous and achieve quick success.

Swati feels if a woman is seeker of pleasure, she should shun the predicament female ideas the purity, morality and chastity as mentioned in the following lines of the novel:

Aparna had grown up with shame. Shame about her body. Shame about her adolescent looks. Shame about her background. Shame practically about every aspect of her life. It was the environment she was raised in. Guilt was its defining feature. She couldn't recall a time when she wasn't made to feel acutely conscious of every small pleasure-emotional or physical." (9)

Women in *Snapshots* try to make themselves happy by breaking the age old tradition to be committed to one man. They have fun, enjoy on the basis of multiple partners and even they never feel ashamed of public.

Aparna gives a very good example of this situation where she had a troubled marriage with Rohit; she had shed her commitment image and took life as it was. She enjoyed her life flirting with Prem, who was her employee, made love with him in public in the seas of Goa but she wasn't emotionally attached with this man as she says in this novel: "No, Aparna was

definitely not in love with the man. She knew for sure. But she needed him – both at work and at play. Prem was a convenience. A cold blooded one. But what the hell. It worked the same way for him too. What's more, he got paid for". (4)

Urbanized Indian women live their own life, and are unconcerned to the self appointed guardian of cultural values. They have complete control over their sexuality and play dangerous game of outplaying men. Pleasure is experienced by both men and women from within despite their social and psychological constraints. Romance, sex, glamour provide peace and pleasure because the couples have been in quarrel, they are bored and suffer from infidelity. Inside a boring relationship, sexual escapades may be the only popular discourse that highlights the question of women's erotic pleasure.

De's women are dissatisfied and unhappy in sexual slavery in the hands of men. Men are indifferent to women's individuality, sensitivity and feelings. These women are victim of infidelity, and uncommitted relationship which makes these women seek for pleasure outside their marriage. These women are in search of personal freedom. They express their anger by resorting to what might be termed as unethical acts like indulging in extramarital affairs. Lesbianism is a counter revolution against the foundation of male privileged society. It

refuses male authority in sexual terms where woman's feelings and desire for sexual pleasure are discarded.

In sexual arena, Shobha De's women do not want to be dominated as an object as a subordinate person. Therefore the writer has tried to prove a point that a woman is so independent that she does not have to depend on a man for seeking pleasure always. She can also find her alternatives where she can discard a man out of her life as she has successfully done while seeking economic independence and marriage. Pleasure may be the source of happiness for a woman but it is not the man who is the only alternative, rather a woman can also prove to be a seeker as well as a provider of pleasure.

Since Shobha De explores the world of urban women in India, she considerably differs from the other Indian women novelists in English in respect of her point of view. Like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai, she is not in favour of the concept of the traditional ideal Indian woman as a doll. Kamala Markandaya in her novels examines the transition of women from a traditional society to an urban, metropolitan society. She portrays the Indian life in the villages. Arundhati Roy believes in submissiveness of women, Anita Desai's realism is psychological one, whereas Shobha De depicts sordid reality. She treats the taboo subject like sex with open-heartedness. She

concentrates only on the problems of the urban women and their psychology and neglects the rural women in her fiction. She deals with the problems of the neo-rich women who defy rebelliously against the moral orthodoxy of the age-old patriarchal social system. The image of a woman reflected in her novels is of a modern or ultra-modern rebellious woman who is strong and bold enough to achieve social and economic equality in the male-dominated world.

De is a feminist novelist with a serious purpose. Her novels are not only thrillers or entertainers or a series of bodice ripper. Though most of the eminent critics have neglected her as a major fiction writer for her free, frank and naked descriptions of battles of sex, her novels serve as an eye-opener to the Indians. She is an advocate of justice, liberty and equality of women. Regarding her sympathy for the women she says, "I did write with a great deal of empathy toward women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the woman's situation" (1998:205).

Shobha De's women do not reach to the height of Catherine in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Devi in Nayantara Sahgal's *A Situation in New Delhi*, Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, Uma in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* or Eliza Doolittle in G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*. However,

De is a writer with a purpose. Though she is condemned in a literary circle as a pornographic author, her point of view and intentions are apparently different. She is an advocate of sex and does not hide anything about the biological phenomenon in her novels. Her novels reveal the Freudian psychology through the male and female characters. Her female characters of subjugated, marginalized, rebellious or neo-rich type have their own faults. They are devoid of real motives, intentions or feelings. The characters such as Anjali, Aasha Rani, Sudha Rani, and Swati are full of lacunas such as shallowness, thoughtlessness, craze for name, fame and glamour. Some of them have lust and some others are lured by the economic gains. All of them seem to be caricatures. De depicts their weaknesses authentically, so they appear to be life-like characters. Shobha De intends to heal the injuries of the female psyche in her imaginative fictional world through free and frank treatment of sex in marital bliss and sex as a curse in premarital or post-marital life. However, her heroines fight for the equality in a dogmatic and patriarchic Indian society.

Shobha De is much criticized for the presentation of women who wander about indulging in free sex, and living a fashionable and wealthy life, but she in no way seems to support the way of life adopted by these so-called modern

women. On the contrary, she shows her contempt and dislike for their unethical and socially unacceptable behaviour in a clear and effective way. The misunderstanding regarding her feminist stance possibly can be associated with her presentation of women who indulge in uninhibited sex and unusual social activities. The recurring depiction of these women's behaviour and the minute details related to the sex act experienced by these women falsely create the impression that De is suggesting their life style as a model for women to experience real happiness, total freedom and an independent existence. But a careful study of her novels reveals the hidden motive in the depiction of such kind of a bizarre life. It cannot be ascertained from the pronounced statements of her characters or from the activities in which these women participate. It may be deduced from the ultimate fate they are condemned to as a result of their indulgence in unusual activities and deviant behaviour. In this respect, Anjali, Aasha Rani, Sudha Rani, Meenakshi Iyengar, Noor, Swati, and all the other former schoolmates in *Snapshots* are the best examples. In the end they all suffer because of their deviant behaviour.

Thus the types of women and their behaviour that the readers find in De's fiction confirm the post-modernist nature of her perspective. There is no essential category of woman to

which her women characters belong. In her novels she rather accommodates and depicts a variety of women with no category to be all-inclusive or absolute. There are not only traditional and modern women that figure in her fictional world but also women representing lesbians, middle-class women, women cloning male behaviour. The novelist does not project any category of women or perspective to be the ultimate.

Thus from the foregoing study of Shobha De's novels it can be concluded that though De is criticized, as 'porn queen of pulp fiction', 'the soft porn star', the writer of the 'bodice ripper', or the 'Jackie Collins'. She is definitely a writer with a purpose. In reply to the above criticism she makes a sarcastic comment thus: "Had my books been written by a man they would have been called 'provocative' or even 'courageous'. But because it is a woman who is writing, they become pornography". (30) Taking this into consideration, it can be asserted that one may love Shobha De or hate her but one cannot ignore her because she is the celebrity writer who has contributed in her own distinct way to the Indian novel in English.