



**Epitome : International Journal
of Multidisciplinary Research**

ISSN : 2395-6968

**IDENTITY OF MODERN WOMEN : A CRITICAL STUDY IN
SHOBHA DE'S FICTION**



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ABSTRACT

Shobha De is a famous novelist. Her novels deal with female protagonists, their search for identity and their sufferings. The women characters are rich, educated, and confident still they suffer due to patriarchal customs and traditions. They go through hardships, heartbreaks, treachery, their husbands being unfaithful, cold and other men being the same yet in the end the entire female characters rise like a phoenix. But in end they rise like a

phoenix. Shobha De writes about women from elite class. She talks frankly about the desires of her female characters. She believes that age should not be an obstacle to do something you believe in. The women in her novels are no longer the traditional women who suffer silently considering that it's her fate. The present research paper throws light on female characters of her famous novels.

KEYWORDS

Identity, patriarchal, customs, traditions

RESEARCH PAPER

The Maharashtra-born Shobha De was born on January 7, 1947, into a family of artists. Bestseller novelist, columnist, screenplay writer, socialite and former model, she has done it all. She has won several honors for her journalism. The Hinglish, a heady and irreverent blend of Hindi and English, is ascribed to her. The Stardust, the Society, and the Celebrity magazines were all created and edited by her. Throughout her writing, she strives to analyse the lives of affluent housewives who are confined by conventions and society's expectations. She is best known for her depiction of socialites and sex in her works of fiction, for which sometimes referred to as the "Jackie Collins of India". Her works translated into many languages.

Socialite Evening is the first novel by Shobha De. It is semi-autobiographical. It explores the dynamics of elite of Indian society. It also highlights the decay of the social values, morality and culture. Novel has two protagonists that is Karuna and Anjali. Karuna belong to a middle-class Maharashtra family living in one small town but she had high ambitions, she become successful model, married to a businessman but there was complete emotional void between Karuna and her husband. She developed extra-marital affair with his friend Girish, gets divorce from her husband, started career as a script writer to Add films and became successful but her this relationship also failed. Anjali, another major character is also from middle class background, she also had high ambitions. She joined Air India as hostess, married to a rich man Abe Tyabjee. Both had extra-marital affairs. After divorce she got married with Kumar who turn out to be a gay so in the end she turns to religion/Spirituality and hates sex. There is another couple Ritu and Gul, there is lack of emotional attachment in this relationship also. He treats her as a whore. She jumps into world of crime and drugs. She was highly tortured and suffered mental and physical harassment.

Starry Nights is Shobha De's second novel, which deals with the dynamics of Indian showbiz industry. It depicts modern woman's struggle and search for identity. Asha Rani is the protagonist in this novel, she is put into film industry when she was small by her mother to earn money. Since her childhood she was exploited by different men. Now she is a top star in industry. She had affairs with Akash Arora and Abhijit Mehra both are married men who never loved her just took advantage of her. She had a lesbian experience with her lesbian friend Linda. Later she departed to New Zealand and married to a foreigner but he divorced her, she had one daughter from this marriage. She come back to India, here after she went to New Zealand her mother puts her sister Sudha Rani in this industry for money. She also become successful star but she was also exploited by men around her, later she suffered acid attack, her sister Asha gives her hope, they decided to open their father's studio again and produce good films and Asha also decided to make her daughter a film star.

Sisters deals with corporate world of 1990s. It is story of two upper class young business women. It throws light on dark realities of business world. Mikki (Mallika) and Alisha Hiralal are protagonist here. After the sudden death of her parents in air-crash Mikki come from America to India and she finds that she has a step sister Alisha by her father. Both sisters struggle hard to retain position which their father left for them. Mikki had no legitimate guardian to look after her. She attends many parties and comes in contact with many young men such as Navin, Shanay and Binny Malhotra who were interested in her only for sexual pleasure. She marries to Binny but this marriage fails as Binny doesn't give her time and attention. He was womanizer he later divorced her. Alisha and Mikki both had many affairs. Mikki gets affected by T.B and Alisha addicted to drugs. Mikki inherit Binny's wealth after his death so Mikki plans to go to London with her step sister Alisha. This departure is a kind of salvation from corrupt world of business. In this novel Shobha De point out the change in the attitude of young generation towards wealth. Now a days the rich young

girls are only concerned with getting married to a rich man so that they can maintain their same life style. Shobha De says that they have forgotten life in the life style and it is only style and hell with everything else. As long as they get what they call 'life style' they really don't care to whom they marry.

Sultry Days is a love story of Nisha and Deb. Nisha belongs to rich class while Deb belongs to middle- class but he was very intelligent, a son of communist. Later he enjoys power and money by being a famous journalist. It also reveals life of girls of Santa Maria High School. These women break established patriarchal norms through their deviant behavior. Their actions and assertions reveal that they are highly independent young modern women. There is another character Yashwantbhai who is underworld king and mafia in Bombay. Pramila a poetess from rural area moves to Bombay and she was exploited by Yashwantbhai. Nisha decides to expose him. Later Deb dies in an accident and Nisha goes back to her family. She stopped writing in English, Pramila also did the same, both now started writing in Marathi language, and they went back to their roots.

Second Thoughts is a story of hollowness and hypocrisy that the traditional Indian marriages display. It's a love story of 90's, middle-class society. Here we have Maya a protagonist who is an educated, beautiful girl from middle-class Bengali family from Calcutta. She was married to Ranjan who studied abroad and now stays in Bombay and works in a bank. Her parents married her just because Ranjan is rich. Ranjan is rigidly conservative and completely indifferent to her desires. She cannot move freely in Bombay, not allowed to use S.T.D facility, cannot use air-conditioner for he alone may use it and that too for limited period, he does not let her use his purse and he repeatedly tells her of her duties as an ideal wife. She develops an extra marital affair with Nikhil, her charming college-going neighbour, who later marries to someone else. So her dreams collapse because he was the only one who used to understand her feelings. Although Shobha De brings out some shortcoming in marriage but she herself believes that marriage is a great sacred institution. In an interview she gave advice to young girls that "having affair is not ok. Marriage is a sacred institute and adultery is bad. She advised them to respect their body. It's not something you trade and not something to be taken casually".

Strange Obsession depicts lesbian relationship between two women. It deals with obsession of Lesbian Minx (Meenakshi) for Amrita. Minx forces Amrita to have lesbian ties with her and firmly believes it something natural. During Amrita's stay in Mumbai for modeling assignments Minx enjoy sex experience with her several times. Even when Amrita goes to Delhi to see her parents Minx follows and constantly haunts her and seduces her. Minx was a daughter of an Inspector General of police to whom money is no object, obsession is everything. She drives around in a black Gypsy and knows every dada and cop in town. Minx is so powerful and liberated woman that Amrita though a supermodel, becomes a mere tool in her hands. Amrita had affair with Rover and Partha, later she married. But Minx had made a blue film of her and Amrita and also of Amrita and her husband so Minx used to blackmail her, later Minx dies and Amrita feels liberated. Mr. Iyenger, Minx's father assured Amrita that all photographs, films, recording and other damaging images were destroyed.

Shobha De writes about female friendship, decay in social values and change in the attitude of young entrepreneur towards wealth, they are making money just for the sake of making money, there is perspective left, no thought of any kind of responsibility other than they have towards making more money. That is a single agenda. They have not contact with reality.

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