

Eroticism in the Novels of Shobhaa De

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Abstract: In the novels of Shobhaa De the varied world of characters are artistically portrayed. Her women are far more different when compared to any ordinary rural women. They belong to city-life and of high status. They live their life to the fullest. They fancy living with no limitations and freeing from all kinds of control of patriarchal rules rampant in the rural society. Shobhaa De's concern is to expose the futility and meaningless pseudo feminist behaviour. De's novels interpret and discover, overtly or covertly, sex-starved women's indulgence in amorous activities. They feel dissatisfied with their husbands and find their love outside in extra-marital affairs. Their quest for liberation and autonomy by shedding the walls of traditionalism, simplicity and morality leads them to live meaningfully. 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 a male-dominated world by using sex as the most important tool.

Key words: Sex Starved, Amorous activity, Erotic, Obscene

Shobhaa De is not the only author to be ridiculed for her forthright and candid depiction of sex. Some other novelists like Khushwant Singh and Sasthi Brata have also been criticized for the same. Mulk Raj Anand was also charged for the use of vulgar and obscene language in his fiction as well. Even in Western literature, several reputed authors like D.H. Lawrence and Philip Roth though patently recognized as indecent have not been discarded for literary studies. Charles Dickens, a British writer whose novels made him the most popular British writer of the 19th century, is still very popular today, who was also charged for vulgarity in his writings. Therefore the objections against De's fiction being erotic or obscene do not have any serious basis. They seem to be the result of narrow and partial understanding of her critical stance. What appears sexual perversions is their sincere endeavour to come to terms with the absurdity of their situation, is the reality of society in urban. De's attitude and her narrative attitude can be clearly seen from the endings of her novels. All the characters who lead uninhibited, immoral life of the richie-rich industrialists, starlets and the social prowlers either finally disappear from the scene or repent and lament such a life. The women characters, in particular, may seem violent and uncontrollable yet ultimately become domesticated and fatigued turning to ordinary settled family life. The recurring theme of search for inner happiness and the presentation of unhappy life of the people populating De's world also makes her position clear. Not even single couples who deny the social norms lead a normal life in her novels. De through this vulgarity has mocked at the society ladies, their behaviour and thoughts. She is aware of the frailties and frivolous concerns of this life. Her narratives are a way to let

these women know their actual stand in the society. It is a means to make them aware of the limitations to be followed or ignored.

Almost in all her novels starting from Socialite Evenings to Sethji, we find numbers of descriptions that are erotic. De makes her stance clear through her mouthpiece Swati in Snapshots.

Sex isn't filthy... our minds make it so. Look at Khajuraho, Konark... have any of you studied Kamasutra? Fascinating. It's a pity we got brainwashed by some frustrated, repressed idiots. I think sex is a celebration—the highest form of religion. (Snapshots...)

Some of the descriptions of intimacy between Aparna and Prem(Snapshots) are too open and vulgar that offends our sensibility and distracts our attention from the subject matter of the novel-

Prem had used his pat of butter to lubricate his fingers, As the first course was served, he had reached under the long damask table cloth, lifted the layers of her cape de chine sari, and found the spot he had been looking for. Gently, cleverly, he had brought her to a climax over and over again, while the boring party continued around them and the colour kept rising in Aparna's check. (SS 11)

Sometimes we even find nude pictures of love, sex and lust that has been depicted in the novels of De as in Snapshots:

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 (SS 158).

'Sexploitation' in its naked form is described in Asha Rani's sexual encounter with Seth Amirchand in Starry Nights. Knowing that nobody in the film world can survive without the blessing and patronage of a rich politician and a womanizer Sheth Amirchand, Aasha Rani feels privileged to

be called over to Amirchand's place. She makes elaborate arrangements for preparing herself to be presented to Shethji.

This time Asha Rani had decided against a saree. She wanted to look youthful and different. The salwar-kameez she chose was a flattering one with a snug bodice that showed curves to advantage. She wore heels....she calculated that Sethji would get impressed..... She grabbed a stick of disco-dust and rubbed some sprangles between her breasts. Perfect. She could take on the Sethji... and half a dozen others.” (SN 59)

The pornological portrayal of Asha Rani doesn't render sensual pleasure rather it hurts the reader. The background of the film world and its naked realism of sexual exploitation is really a new finding in fiction. Shobhaa De is perhaps the first writer who dares to give a realistic picture of the glamour world and enlighten the readers about the unseen lane of the film world. In the novel *Sethji* De also tries to present the reality behind money and power. To expose the dark amoral heart of Indian politics Amrita the protagonist is portrayed by De as,

You used your body to gain control over me. More importantly, you played your game very well. As if you were doing me the world's biggest favour by letting me fuck you. Bakwas! (Sethji 284)

The above statement by Amrita's father- in- law 'Sethji' suggests that how a woman incestuously links into many relationships only to achieve power in politics.

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 history of Indian writing in English that the novelist adopts bitter and contemptuous tone to expose the filthy world in 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 imaginative reconstruction of sordid reality which she has observed in big metropolises that makes her fictional world authentic.

Thus from the study of Shobhaa De's novels it can be concluded that though De is criticized, as 'pornqueen of pulp fiction', 'the softporn star', the writer of the 'bodice ripper', or the 'Jackie Collins' etc., she is definitely a writer with a purpose. In reply to 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" (-<http://www.pugmarks.com/week/steamyhtm>). Taking this into consideration, it can be asserted that one may love Shobhaa De or hate her but one cannot ignore her because she is the celebrity writer who has contributed in her own distinct way to Indian novel in English.

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