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# Visibility Comes with Otherness: A Study on Overcoming Self-Stigmatization in The Novels of Shobha De

**P.Anusooya,**
Full-Time Research Scholar,
Department of English,
National College (Autonomous),
(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University).

**Dr.T.S.Ramesh,**
Associate professor & Research Supervisor,
Department of English,
National College (Autonomous),
(Affiliated to Bharathidasan University).

**Abstract**

Asymmetry in power relationship is central to Shobha De's novel, which forms the concept of Otherness. The dominant group, that is patriarchy, is in a position to impose the valid of its particularity and devalue the particularity of others, while imposing corresponding discriminate measures. Simon de Beauvoir views if the other of man is women, the opposite is not true. In the novels of Shobha De, the protagonists act as out- group and are viewed to be others when they manage to escape the oppression forced upon them by patriarchy who acts as in- group. This idea is highlighted through the novels of Shobha De and through the characters of Asha rani, Mikky, Alisha, Minx, Nisha and Maya.

**Keywords:** Otherness, patriarchal, discrimination, liberation.

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The term 'Otherness' refers to the condition of not being alike or the same. It does not allow any person to confirm one's self to social rules. It rejects sociological, political, and psychological sphere of individual who does not fit into customs of the society. The

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

awareness of Otherness lies just on the divide. It is generally the issue of 'us' and 'them'. The novels of Shobha De highlight the concept of 'Otherness'. In tune with this, it is apt to quote Bennet and Royal who say: "Every genre, especially novel, encounters the presence of 'Otherness' strongly determined by representation of social stratification" (p.136). In her novels, Shobha De has brought out women with vigour and talent. They are not complaint. They lead a life of their own. They violate patriarchal norms of the society aggressively. Tripti Karekatti in her article, "Theme of Sisterhood in Shanta Gokhale's Rita Walinker, Shashi Deshpande's, "A Matter of Time" and Shobha De's Sisters" States: "De, while striking a pose of an informed woman writer with a certain stand on issues of women, reinforces most of the orthodox patriarchal assumptions about women and their desires and needs"(110). Shobha De casts challenging and defiant novel women. She is the vanguard in order to change the image of women socially. In her works, she has raised the problem of sexuality in tradition bound Indian society. Furthur, ShivikaVarma in her article *The Novels of Shobha De: A Feminist Study* States: "Shobha De has raised sexuality as a weapon and as a problem for the women in the traditional Indian society. Her women characters are free from the chains of husbamd and society, reactionary and rebel, and 'new women' and 'a liberated human being"(102).

Shobha De's women have the audacity to hitch up their voice against their male dominated society. Bhaskar A. Shukla in his article, *Shobha De: The Writer and Feminism* states: "Shobha De's women are free about their sexual expression. They will not tolerate infidelity on her on the part of their husbands. All sexual taboos are broken by them with gusto" (211). Shobha De's characters like Maya in *Second Thoughts* and Karuna in *Socialites Evening* reveal vitality and the courage to rebel against male chauvinism. These protagonists are not for subordination. They want assert them through their voices.

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Pratibha Gupta in her articles *A social semiotics study of narratives*" observes:

> "De's style depicts new women in a mood of revolt. It undermines the old mythologies of gender relationships by questioning and revising them. They are challenging the stereotypes, fairy tales, traditions and histories that are prescribed plots of their lives and estimate their authority and power. She is now like a released, long blocked river sweeping away everything coming her way. And very often it has devastating effect on the society. (35)

The awakened spirits of the characters make them to realise their potentials. Ashish Gupta in *The Androgynous World of New Women in Shobha De's fiction asserts*:

> De has designed an atmosphere where woman is not living as a victim but a victor. In her works, she has advocated rebellious sort of woman ready to revolt against established social taboos which tie her to behave as passive one and always be subjugated by man's authority.(4)

Shobha De's *Starry Nights* describes how women want to escape from the traditional walls in order to survive. As Sandhiya Rani Dash in her article A *Woman more Sinned than Sinning: A study of Starry Nights* writes:

> Shobha De's writing seems abominable and bizarre to us as she is a woman and we are not habituated to listen to woman talking so much about sex so freely and frankly. But the novel is not simply a treatise on sex; it depicts the modern woman's search for identity in a male-dominated society. (172)

In *Sisters*, Shobha De tries to depict the statuette of new woman who tries to content herself in the male dominated world. The novel is about liberated way of life of Mallika alies Mikky.

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

E. Sathyanarayan in his article *The Dialectics of self Assertion*: *The Liberated Women in Sisters* claims:

> Unlike its predecessors, Sisters for the first time deals with the psychic its predecessors, S*isters*for the first time deals with the psychic conflict in its liberated woman-protagonist who is caught between a 'personal self' and a 'societal self.' The novel thus focuses as much on the seamy side of the business life as on the inner turmoil of the Protagonist(211).

Mikky has sister known as Alisha. These two sisters hold each other close because Mikky takes charge of Alisha's life. Naresh k. Vats comments about their relationship in the following lines:

> Shobha De's *Sisters* enrols the story of Mikky and Alisha who represent new woman of India in a new Avatar, with a new identity. The narrative moves through many phases of sordidness and joy leading them to experience the moments of Self –actualization-the term defined by psychologists as a feeling of maturity, a complete acceptance of one's self, a childhood wonder and arrangement for the world (80).

Shobha De's *Strange Obsession* is an explosive novel. It portrays two young women Amrita and Meenakshi who is known as Minx. They have lesbian bond because of the outcome of hatred and deception of men. Minx's, Lesbian relationship is observed by Neelam Tikka in the following manner: "By belonging to Amirta, protecting and helping her, she posed a great threat to male dominance and disrupted patriarchal oppression" (220). The Lesbian tendencies of Minx clearly show that she wants to show that women are also capable of performing everything equal to man. This idea of Minx is Quoted in the following manner "You belong to me and I belong to you, it's that simple" (96).

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Further the following lines of L Sonia Ningthoujam's proves their lesbian relationship *Traditional Woman versus Modern Woman: A Study of Shobha De's Novels* says:

> The lesbian relationship between Amrita and Minx shows the emerging realty of the new modern woman who finds sexual satisfaction with persons of the same gender. A new moral code is thus distinctly emerging, as these women freely choose their partners whether they belong to the opposite sex or to the same sex. (38)

The Lesbianism between Minx and Amirta is a kind of shake to male domination in sexual encounters. This is observed when Minx says in Ecstasy: "I worship you.... You are my goddess.... My Devi.... I live for you. I shall die for you" (107). The novel *Strange Obsession* has brought out radical views of postmodern woman not in contradiction of the institution of marriage, but an escape from male domination. This is proved when Naresh K. Vats says:

> "*Strange Obsession* is different from other novels of Shobha De which deal with the theme of refusal of modern Indian women to carry the load of traditional morality and their liberation from the dictate of traditional male chauvinated society. (99)

In *Sultry Days* the Survives of women in the world of glummer pose a sort of threat to hegemony of men. It is observed by L. Sonia Ningthoujam in her article, "*Realism: Life-like characters"* observes:

> The novel thus revolves around the women who are strong and confident. These women know what they want. The -not-so-pleasant side of the lives of these women who live unconventional and fast lives is in consonance with the temper of the

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

> modern times particularly with the new trends of life of the sophisticated socialite women whose portraits have been drawn by De and other feminist writers. (95)

Maya in *Second Thoughts* is the reproduction of Indian Middle class woman who rebel against male macho. Ranjan, her husband, is cold and passive to her emotional responses. So, she tries to break the marital bond that delimits her freedom. She resorts to extra- marital relationship with Nikhil. L Sonia Ningthoujam in her article, "*Traditional women versus Modern Woman: A Study of ShobhaDe's Novels*" says: "Maya's frustration and rebellious nature cannot allow her to take her husband's indifference lying down. Maya decides to seek the fulfilment of her dreams elsewhere, however sinful it might be"(40).

Thus, Maya in order to escape her wizened experiences in her nuptial life, she follows her own propulsion to effectuate her dreams. Thus, the novels of Shobha De delineates the real picture of new women which differentiates of their life. The differences imparted by individuals disability contributes more dissimilarity than actually exist"(Bogdan& Knoll, p.230). This has lead to the perception of Otherness. To be precise, patriarchal differences contribute more dissimilarity between man and woman. But, Shobha De's protagonists with their fighting spirit and rejuvenating consciousness emerge as New Women. The problem of Shobha De's is not confined to Indian context. Rather her writings have universal appeal because of the tendencies of self- assertion of women in all over the world.

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