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Portrayal of Seductively Treacherous Women by Shobha De with Special Reference to  
Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights and Strange Obsessions

**Abstract**

Over the years Shobha De, the beet noire of the contemporary Indian literary circuits, has become synonymous with the desirable appeal and an undeniable charm. The fight for survival at every turn in life has undoubtedly forced men to have a quest for identity and it creates unwanted crises, physical and emotional traumas in the modern generation. The time tested populist feature of sex and a turbulent style go to make one of the themes, variety of characters, and startlingly captivating thought, all forcefully and colorfully expressed by De in a unique style in her novels. The time has come when she has to embark upon fresh fields and new pastures. At the most her novels are pulp-fiction, which sell well and read well but they fail to meet the aesthetics of feminism.

**Keywords:** Noire, Turbulent, Embark, Pastures

Modernism and Post-Modernism coupled with Industrial development have exercised great collision on human-life, culture, society and it creates a very radical effect on the way of life the people have adopted. The metropolitan culture in Bombay, to which, De's novels and characters are confined, has received the effects of modern upheavals and the whole panorama of life has undergone a sea change. With an impersonal objectivity in De's sincere efforts, unbiased and unprejudiced, she portrays a series of men and women of the upper class society in a very beautiful manner. In portraying, De sometimes does not accept the traditional notions of women. In this connection Swain says: "Women in Shobha De's novels symbolize the overpowering materialism and the lack of spirituality that characteristics the modern age with the crumbling of moral and ethical values, there is an inner conflict which drives the modern Indian women, to seek shelter in different identities for momentary solace."(p 133)

De's novel shows the struggle of woman against the predatory male – dominated society. But her vamp ideology of feminism provides no emancipation for the deviant and fallen women who in their frantic struggle to escape male – domination and attain individuality, meet with failure and are victimized in one way or the other. In enacting the drama of seduction and betrayal in her venture against patriarchal structures, the glamorous vamp in De's novel: "May end up being as seductively treacherous to women as to men."(p 145)

De gives the ironic presentation of certain ideas through a conflict in man-woman relationship. The female characters in her novel are subjugated and dominated by cruel, self-absorbing men as well as by those men who seem to be quite humble, honest, caring who roam about indulging in free sex and living fashionable and wealthy life treating it a mark of women liberation. The protagonist like Karuna, Aasha Rani, Anjali, Rita, Sudha-Rani, Amrita, Minx, Linda practice free and uninhibited sex. In their search for feasible human relationship on equal terms and their assertion of control over their body and mind these women tend to inhibit the difference that marks the existence of their separate feminine identity. But in the end in their false and ill found concept of women's freedom these women deviate from their real motive that gets obscured due to the temporary charisma offered by their deviant behavior. Shobha de wants to show that the

extramarital relationship and sexual escapades in no way may can be considered a solution to the problem of oppressed and subjugated women.

Sometimes we find love-hate relationship in De's Novels. In dealing with the problems of women in the andocentric society, she fails to provide viable solutions to the plight of the ailing woman. De's fictional world has aroused curiosity and interest on the one hand and downright rejection and denunciation on the other.

"Socialite Evening", for example, was branded as "high society potpourri, bland and banal" bristling with orgy – laced parties, 'Starry Night' with its brazen portrayal of sex and 'sexploitation' seals a march over the earlier novel, was described as "*confession of a man-eater*". Shobha De's novel indicates the arrival of a new Indian woman eager to challenge rebelliously against the well- entrenched moral orthodox of the patriarchal social system. Her novels are not just a series of "bodice ripper". One may not like everything in De's fiction, but her treatment of the contemporary urban Indian woman's challenges, predicament, values and life-styles is surely not without significance. She herself said: "I write with great deal of empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the woman's situation"(p 113)

The cardinal issue thrashed by Shobha De in her novels relates to power, the desire to dictate and direct action and thinking of others, which is uppermost in human psychology. Shobha De writes:

"Eventually, every relationship is a power struggle either on an overt or subliminal level ----- control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries. Women's destinies have been determined largely in that context alone ---- It is time they were made aware of their own potential and power. Shakti needs to be harnessed, directed and explored for the furtherance of overall human development. The very concept of the sexes locked in the eternal battle is negative and destructive ---- when one talks of Shakti unleashed, one also remembers the two connotations of Shakti – the destructive avatar is as potent as the creative one. It is in maintaining the state of equilibrium between these two opposing forces that can lead to creative and dynamic harmony --- Men will have to come to terms with womanpower."(p 113)

Shobha De has brought in suitably economic aspects of power struggle. Eventually, she thinks that everything boils down to money-that great leveler. There can be no talk of independence for women without economic self-sufficiency. De, however while advocating economic independence of women, would not support of mania for money. The subordinate of women in a malist culture is symptomatic of hierarchization of socio-moral values between sexes. It symbolizes the divergence between activities and passivity, between meek respect and defiance. Helen Cixous observe: "Women are often the symbol of passivity. Either the woman is passive or she doesn't exist. What is left is unthinkable, unthought-of. She does not enter into the opposition; she is not coupled with the father who is coupled with the son".(p 62)

But De views woman not only as meekly rebellious but also as the embodiment of power. Taking up a non-conformist stance, De adopts radical feminist point of view all agog to demolish the sex-gender system-the real source of women's oppression and to create a new society in which men and women are equals at every level of existence. In order to avoid sexual exploitation or eroticization of women as mere sex object, Millet advocates a society having a single standard of 'sex freedom' for boys and girls without which the equality between men and women will remain ephemeral. De has fully uncovered the feminine world of the characters since for her, humanness should be identifies with feminists.

A new generation of 'wild', 'lusty' and 'wandering' women like those of De's female character will be created who would prefer to identify themselves as drastic lesbian feminist separatists. De's women cast off the conventional sense of morality, the old, fired repressive sexual moves and reveal in the erotic celebration of the body. Could we call De, a pornographic and vulgar novelist since she depicts the naked sexual description in her novels? Actually Shobha De may be aiming to do to relive or release their sexual tensions, when she describes the lusty sexual scenes.

De presents her women with lots of "pot-passion". No wonder that De has aroused authentic storm and fiery debate rages around her, But it seems that De is being taken seriously because three of her novels have been chosen by the reputed school of Oriental and African studies, London as course material. Paul Roberts puts his opinions about De: "As good writer enigmatic, straightforward, crude, erudite, girlish, and wise."

De thinks female prejudice is one of the most regressive elements in a social set up. Women long for love dependency and the material and emotional comfort of affixed class identity. Sexual expression, banter descriptions and some shining examples of physical intimacy in her novels are befitting background for an in depth analysis of the modern Indian Society in which the women are always finding her on the wrong foot and the receiving ends. De's expression is forceful and colorful which fascinates the readers.

De describes the new concept of marriage and contemplates sexual freedom with no notion of fidelity. Economic freedom promiscuity and uncontrolled zeal result in lust and makes men and women valuable resulting in life. De's men and women are characters who are hideous to each other. Both are self – indulgent material creatures, repeating the same litany of lust and unfulfilled desire, often ending in fantasy, rejection, boredom, suicide or heart attacks. There is no other release for them, as they never introspect into the source of the nature of their desires. They are afraid of the pain and effort this would involve. Here men and women do not form relationship. They bargain contracts. The woman is anxious to get the better of men and of other women and this anxiety diminishes them, narrows their world and their world concerns. Humanity is lost somewhere in this process.

De's fiction is real. Her novels are pragmatic picture of hypocrisy, degenerated values and double standards of the people of higher standard of the society. Though she says that she does not wave the banner of feminism but she writes about women, their pangs, their quest for self-hood and self-identity either in their married life or even if single. In the interviews she says: "I speak on behalf of the minorities and women are the new minorities in the world."(p 152)

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