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Teena G. Upadhyay (Tiwari)

Asst. Professor, Scope College of Engineering, Bhopal.

Research Scholar

Barkatullah University, Bhopal (M.P.)

Email id: teena0306bpl@gmail.com

Inter-Women Relationship in the Novels of Shobha De

ABSTRACT: Among Indians writing in English, Shobha De's name has come to be associated with the term 'male-bashing'. Hounded by adverse criticism she remains unruffled, basking in the glorious sunshine of the reading. Shobha De is a writer who has actively participated in Feminist movement without being called herself as a feminist. She writes mostly about urban elite woman and has effectively highlighted their problems. She has got the mind with the sharpness of an eagle which has captured the plight of women. In all her novels men are on the periphery and female occupies centre role. The present paper focuses on the inter women relationship in the selected novels of Shobha De. The endeavor here taken is to show how far the proverb "A woman is woman's worst enemy" is true about Shobha De's novels.

Key words: Male-bashing, Feminist movement, endeavor.

Shobha De herself asserts that "I write with a great deal of empathy towards women without waving the feminist flag. I feel very strongly about the woman's situation" (Dodiya, 35). Feminist's perspective has gained prominence ever since such women writers as Kamla Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Amrita Pritam and Shobha De began to create and treat women's issue in their works. All the novels of Shobha De are characterized by her sense of empathy for the women who having come out of the bounds of domesticity and marriage; assert their identity. Shobha De dives deep into the hearts of the liberated upper class women in the contemporary society and depicts the real characters as they are and not as they ought to be. Shobha De, who is quite unconventional and unorthodox in the presentation of women behavior in her novels, is supposed for liberty, equality and consolidation of women power in the society. K.Mirabai rightly remarks in this context.

"Shobha De's women are strives and aspire, towards freedom, towards goodness, towards a compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit; a kind of untouched innocence and integrity". (K. Mirabai, 41)

She beautifully and candidly highlights the problems of suffering of women caused by the paradoxical social, cultural and moral values set by men. But if we dig deep into the novels it's

really astonishing that the female protagonists suffered not only due to the male domination but due to the women also.

In socialite evening Karuna, hates her social status for not being a part of smart and gorgeous world. She had an ambition of being successful in her life but her mother in place of supporting her always demoralizes her by saying that girls from respected families are expected to obey the males when Karuna was blamed with cheap remarks during her pregnancy by her husband. "I am sure it isn't mine. Now, you'd better ask yourself whose child you've carrying". (SE, 215)

She boldly encounters the situation and decided to abort the child. Instead of healing her wounds her mother disown her for her doings. "What you've done is unacceptable. Nobody in our family has done it before; nobody will do it in the future. You've made the mistake, now you pay the price". (SE, 219)

Karuna was an uncompromising woman. She says no to be a dependant doll and makes a bold decision, she breaks her marriage and settles to live independently with her parents like a responsible and caring daughter. But her mother suggested her it's difficult for a woman to live alone without a man around. Not supported her to move on to build a bright career. Karuna replied to her mother, "But mother why does security rest with a man? I feel confident now that I can look after myself". (SE, 256). But at last, when her mother saw that her daughter is self-sufficient and a brave, bold, career-oriented woman she not only supported her but applaud her a lot. Another female character of importance is Anjali who in the real sense influenced Karuna. She tried to drag Karuna in the glamorous world. But feel threatened and envious of Karuna when she became more successful than her but later on supported her when she finds divorcee Karuna in trouble. She advises her to claim money from her husband. "You need money. I wasn't suggesting you to rob the guy. But you are entitled to compensation. You have invested all these many years in this marriage-do it you think it's your right to claim something. (218)

In *Starry Nights*, Asha Rani, the sweetheart of millions was made money making machine at very early childhood by her crazy, ambitious mother. She forced her to perform in the porn films, to accompany in bed the big film producers and directors. Thus, in place of becoming a savior she herself opened the gate to hell for her daughter. Her sister, Sudha, who can stoop to any depth to axe her grid, also betrayed her by snatching her position in film industry. In a fit of agony, Asha Rani decided to leave the film world and Amma provoked Sudha Rani to take place of Asha Rani. Sudha did but later on she also discarded Amma who supported her to build her career. At last Sudha met a tragedy and realizes her mistake.

Another female character Malini; Akshay Arora's wife also called Asha Rani a whore, stealing husband instead of blaming her husband Akshay. Akshay needs sex and also wants variety in it, therefore looses interest in Malini who can't fulfill his demands. But Malini being a woman fails to understand Asha Rani and protected her husband.

Linda, friend of Asha Rani, does not hesitate to write against her in spite of having physical intimacy with her.

“Sisters” is the story of two step sisters Mikki and Alisha. Mikki is the legitimate daughter of Seth Hiralal. She is the matured and strong girl. She inherited the business empire of his father after his death which was in loss. But Mikki showed her managerial skills and controlled all things. She stands tall though aloof and not dependent yet successful. Alisha is the illegitimate daughter of Seth Hiralal and he never acknowledges Alisha and her mother publically or legally. She feels envious of her half-sister. The hatred is seen in the words of Alisha when she finds a line in a newspaper after death of her father.

“Look at this! Ha, Ha! Survived by his only child, mummy wake up you must see all this rubbish!” “Only Child” she mocked. “And what about me? What am I? A Puppy? A Kitten? A Pet?” (Sisters,405). She always believes that it is Mallika’s presence that denied her the rights which she should have received being the elder daughter of Seth Hiralal. To avenge her humiliation she beds with the former fiancé Navin of Mikki. But towards the end of the novel when Alisha attempted suicide Mikki saved her life by giving her blood and also acts as a surrogate mother when she was suffering from drug addiction. Alisha also plays a maternal role when Mikki suffers from consumption. Both sisters finally reconcile with each other and decide to face the world together as friends and sisters.

Conclusion: Thus, it is clear from the above discussion that the proverb, ‘A woman is woman’s worst enemy’ is true to a large extent as per Shobha De’s novels are concerned. But what is peculiar about her novel is at the end of these novels, inter-woman relationship ends at a optimistic node. Starting with the rivalry at last they emerged as strength together to beat the world. As in socialite evening after so much restrictions of Karuna’s mother Karuna successfully played role of a son for her parents. She is a victorious in her professional life due to the support of her mother. In *Starry Nights*, Asha Rani met her cruel fate due to her mother, Mallini, Linda and her own sister Sudha. But after many kinds of bitter experiences and hardships, Asha Rani recollects herself with all her shattered dreams and rises like phoenix to win the world once again with her mother, sister and daughter by re opening the studio for the sake of her family banner. In *Sisters* also the relationship of two sisters starting with jealous and hatred ends at a healthy, strong and happy relationship. Though Shobha De is considered controversial writer but being a woman she is very successful in portraying women relationship in her novels as per the estimation of Janaki Ramchandra, “ you may love or hate her, but it is difficult to ignore her”.(Choudhary Monika, 32)

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