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The Making of a Writer: Shobha DE Autobiography of Shobha De: Selective Memory

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Abstract

Shobha De, one of the distinguished Literary writers of South Asia has been able to bring name and fame throughout the world through her exemplary writing. She is credited with making records, bagging awards with her breakthrough bold and highly individual style of writing. She entered the world of glamour through modelling but soon separated herself from it and entered Journalism. One of the major reasons of Shobha De's popularity as a writer is her intimate understanding of the psyche of woman and her problems. She has written many fiction and non fiction books which have become best sellers and made her a globally recognised Indians writer. Through her novels Shobha De has been successful in portraying the image of a New Woman who is ready to revolt against traditional and orthodox patriarchal society and is in search of her selfidentity, seeking liberation in all fields. Shobha De has been a successful non fiction writer following the lines of New Journalism and brought herself fame and position in the World of Literature.

Keywords: Literary, Exemplary, globally, traditional, orthodox, patriarchal, selfidentity, New Journalism

1. Introduction

Writing is an art which needs creativity and language skills so that one is able to inculcate feelings and thoughts and all imaginative ideas through it. Through her artistic creativity of writing Shobha De has excelled in the field of Writing.

Shobha De was born as Shobhaa Rajadhyaksha on 7th of January 1947 in Maharashtra in a Saraswat Brahmin family. De is credited to be the founder of most famous magazines Stardust, Society and Celebrity. She became a controversial but successful writer with her debut novel, Socialite Evenings. She is among the 50 most powerful women in India as published by the DNA newspaper. She was also featured as the 50 most powerful people in India by a leading lifestyle magazine Verve. She has in fact become internationally acclaimed writer. Four of her books are studied as course material in the university of London.

De has emerged as one of the best and highest selling authors and a popular social commentator. Reader's Digest has voted her as one of India's most trusted people which itself proves how much people regard her writing. She is also credited with evolving a new Language Hinglish which is a combination of Hindi and English and has become quite popular with Indian people. She has very brilliantly used the combination of both languages, to give the exact essence to the context as well as a good connectivity to the Indian readers.

She is even known as Jackie Collins of India as sex finds a special place in almost all her novels. In the Sunday section of magazine column of The Times of India she has successfully explored the Lives of many celebrities mostly Bollywood film stars. She has also written for TV serials like Swabhiman which became very popular and almost gave a beginning to a serial of television Soaps.

Most of her novels have been best sellers and most of her novels deal with the marginalization of women in India, mostly in the metropolitans. We find her female protagonists, who is more often belonging to higher society, very ambitious and ready to achieve their goals at any cost, even staking their marriage. De successfully brings out the internal conflict that the women undergo, her emotions in the form of love, hatred, pain, sorrow, revenge, sex, possessiveness etc is beautifully brought out in her stories.

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Socialite Evenings (1989) ^[5] her debut novel was a great commercial success. It was a mirror to the so called high class society of Mumbai. It brought out the suppressed feelings of rich housewives who were ready to go to any extent to fulfill their desire and wants.

Starry Nights (1991) was a sensational success as here Shobha De had based her story on the scandalous affairs of Rekha and Amitabh Bachchan, the hottest stars of Bollywood in those days.

Sultry Days (1994) is a romantic realistic tale set in Mumbai which presents the modern college going youth who spoil their career on being misguided by modern trends.

Sisters (1992) Sisters is a fiction in which De again brings out a good combination of ambition, greed, lust and emotions which forces the readers to get fully absorbed in the story.

Strange Obsession (1992) De deals with even more sensitive issue of lesbianism and father daughter sexual relationship apart from extramarital affairs, frustration of women etc.

Seth Ji (2012) is the portrayal of the dark side of political world, about ambition, greed and above all trust.

In her nonfictions, De brings out to her story what Joe Nocera in his evaluation of Wolfe's essays says, "an eye for the telling detail, a psychological acuity, an ability to get inside the characters thoughts and a willingness to hide the ball at least for a while, leaving the reader in giddy suspense. Her main non fictional novels are Uncertain Liaisons, Shooting From the Hip. Small Betrayals, and Surviving Men, Selective memory, Speed post and Spouse:

Uncertain Liaisons: Sex, Strife and Togetherness (1993) This has been edited by Shobha De and Khushwént Singh as a joint collaboration. Extra marital affairs, sex, and unhappy married lives are its many themes.

Surviving Men (1997) is a guide to understanding Indian men. 'It is the smart woman's guide to staying on top'. Shobha De guides women through the different hurdles of life that they have to face.

Speedpost (1999) ^[10] is quite different from all other books of Shobha De. In most of the Novels of Shobha De we have seen strong ladies fighting with the traditional and orthodoxy rules and regulations, Contrary to that New Women image, in this book we can see a mother who is Shobha De herself, who strives hard to keep her children on the right path, tries to give as much love and care as possible, spend lots and lots of time with them compromising self in all other areas, regrets and even apologizes at many times if she feels she was wrong at any point. The Book is about living, loving, caring and coping with the world.

Spouse (2005) ^[7] is yet another guide for husband and wife who want to have loving and happy relationship throughout their life. She gives useful tips for having a successful happy married life. She believes marriage is about trust, companionship, affection and sharing

Superstar India: From Incredible to Unstoppable (2008), in this book Shobha De has again written in her bold, witty individualistic passionate writing how we can keep high our countries.

Shobha at Sixty (2010): In this book Shobha De provides an extra ordinary outlook to life, advancement and progress in all areas.

Seventy. . . . And To Hell With It ! (2017) is her recent release on turning to her seventieth year and still giving a newness to her writing and discussing on topics like love , politics, relationships youth etc.

Lockdown Liaisons (2020) is a collection of short stories in which De has written about her own experiences as well as about others who are going through this difficult phase of covid-19 epidemic.

Selective Memory (1998) ^[9] is an autobiographical book in which Shobha De has tried to pen down her happy and sad memories, memories which she considered precious and enjoyed writing. She writes about her childhood memories, about the film celebrities, brings out bright as well as dark sides of her life. She has narrated the problems of the urban women in general as well as in particular. We are able to see Shobha De as a daring daughter, home maker wife and a mother to six children. She has depicted herself as a proud mother of six children. In this book she is more innovative, confessional, experimental and realistic than she was ever before.

Jaydipsinh and R.K. Dhawan in the Introduction of his book writes about Selective Memory

'Though Shobha De does not reveal all the secrets of her hectic colourful life. Selective Memory sum as an excellent source to understand the author and her life. An unbiased reading of the autobiography gives us an authentic picture of the middle-class Maharashtrian woman and her various roles in a model, columnist and writer. Her treatment of the contemporary urban woman's position and the challenges she faces is not without significance'. Shobha De writes

"I did write with a great deal of empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the woman's situation." Largely speaking, Indian fiction depicts three kinds of women: first, the poor women, belonging mostly to the rural class, portrayed by writers like Kamala Markandaya and R.K. Narayan; secondly, the middle class women, especially the educated and employed, depicted by writers like Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande; and thirdly, the neo-rich aristocrat women depicted by writers like Namita Gokhale and Shobha.



Prologue to her Selective Memories gives us a glimpse of how the writer Shobha De was motivated to write her autobiography. She starts with a telephonic conversation between her and David Davidar, the CEO of Penguin

Publishers in India. David was the person who had inspired her to write her memoir and she begins writing her memories in the form of a book which was named Selective Memory. She admits that she has not used any notes or dates or any diary writing or clippings.

“Just a myriad echoes and images, mostly colourful, generally pleasant”. She also doesn't follow any chronological order and so it cannot be called a perfect autobiography rather she writes incidents and happenings between her past and her present just on the basis of her memory. De has included full dialogues and conversations throughout the book which is an important attribute of New Journalism.

She has been very frank in telling her readers how her own birth as a girl child was not a welcome for her orthodox family. She mentions that she was a good athlete and the holder of state level records in long Jump and sprint events in her school days. She even made to the state level teams of Basketball and Hockey.

We come to know that she started modelling at the age of 17 secretly but when her father found out this, he scolded her scornfully and he wanted her to become doctor, lawyer or an engineer. But De confesses that she did not want to become any of those in her life. As a model she had to take permission from her parents and then only she could pose for only decent pictures. She was happy with this part time profession because it gave her a feeling of independence.

She tells further that soon she was bored of her modelling career and coincidentally reached a Creative Unit where she met its head Nari Hira, and thus began her new career which ultimately gave birth to the writer Shobha De which we know today. Nari Hira had found the creativity that existed in her and offered her to be the founder and editor of a new magazine Stardust. She admits plainly “it was only with Nari Hira's never say die optimism which made us believe that the magazine would be a cakewalk. And indeed it became India's Number One Film Magazine. According to her, Stardust spared no one in the film industry and that became its real strength. A credible level of objectivity was sustained in the magazine's pages which contributed towards its success. The magazine gave her an opportunity to write about many film stars like Rajesh Khanna, Shatrughan Sinha, Kabir Bedi, Zeenat Aman and many more. She tells us how the actors were quite different on the screen and in their personal lives.

In *Flying Solo* she writes about the darkest phase of her life. She reveals how she started her own magazine *Celebrity* and after this start-up, started facing all sorts of problems and there began a downfall in her professional as well as personal life.

She writes “I had never been in such a situation before. Nothing, but nothing was going right financially or emotionally. My marriage was breaking up. The magazine I started ‘*Celebrity*’, was facing all sorts of problems. For the first time in my adult life, I felt alone, alienated and isolated.” (ibid 12)

She admits that the book *Starry Nights* was somewhat based on the relationship of Rekha and Amitabh, two most famous Bollywood stars but it was not a complete telling of their off screen lives. *Starry Nights* had caused major shock waves when it was published. Her book *Strange Obsessions* and *Sisters* caused similar ripples everywhere.

In the section *On Being a Writer, A Columnist and a Media Person*, her first chapter *A Hard De's Writes*, she shares her

problems which she faces while writing, her numerous household chores are kept aside and then she's able to give few undisturbed hours to her writing work.

De writes

“For a woman, a book in progress is like a secret lover she has to hide from her family. Steel time to go back to. Dream about. Luxuriate in. Fantasize about. It's: guilty secret she can't share with anybody. There is a sense of regret-you can't make love to a book or talk to it. And yet, the secret thrill of each encounter provides a high. The book makes you feel desirable, sexy, beautiful, interesting. It's better than the best sex.” (Pg no 2, selective memory)

Conclusion

Shobha De as an individual is an outspoken, frank, straight forward confident and independent minded person and her novels also reflect these characteristics. Her writing is quite bold and unique bringing out the clear picture of the metropolitan city life and its challenges. She seems to be gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life very delicately and minutely. Language used in her books is of international standard and thus many of her books have been prescribed in the various universities of the world. Her fearless and bold writing has led her to the path of success in her writing career.

She fearlessly speaks her mind through her columns be it on politicians, filmstars or any controversial issue. Her books have been translated into various international languages like French, Spanish, Italian, Russian etc. She gets into her characters and tries to present them in the most realistic way.

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