

NAKED IMAGES OF SEX AND LESBIANISM IN SHOBHA DE'S NOVELS

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Shobha De is born in a Saraswat Brahmin family in Maharashtra on January 7, 1947. She did her graduation from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. After that she started journey of her career in different fields. She brought out three magazines Stardust, Society, and Celebrity as a journalist. She is a model, columnist and freelance-writer in a few newspapers and magazines. She is mother of six children and she lives in a posh colony in Mumbai with her second husband Dilip De. Her erotic matter in her novels has invited criticism as there are naked pictures of sex and lesbianism in her novel. Shobha de's novels are not only the pictures of city life and manners but, to some extent, these works are influenced by her life also. These are reflections of what she thinks about her society. Her own views and thoughts have been poured down by her in the form of novels. Bhaskar A. Shukla contends on this, "Shobha De voices against the malist culture and strongly detects the marginalization of women. She does not believe in describing her women characters as love-slaves or bitches or mere helpmates at home. In her novels she presumably mirrors her own feminist and sexist mindset" (Shukla 115).

The images of sex are so naked that Shobha De' novels cannot be shared in the family and dialogue-delivery or the words in the novels are so dirty which are not worth sharing in the bed-rooms in the traditional rural families. As she has been the resident of a big city and she has seen the film industry from closer-quarters where the naked-dance of Indian culture is easy to see openly. That's why she has brought out the ugly, filthy but real images of the women of big cities like Mumbai. The women in her novels are different from the ordinary traditional rural women. They belong to city-life and of high status. They have their own way of living their life. They prefer to live with no restrictions and free from all kinds of clutches of patriarchal rules prevalent in the rural society. Narender Kumar Neb in her article "Shobha De: To Read or Not to Read" says, "De' treatment of female sexuality gives the impression that she propagates free sex and macho female behavior as a means of women's emancipation. But the reality is different and De's real concerns are rather otherwise. Her Prime concern is to expose the futility and meaningless of such kind of pseudo feminist behavior" (Neb 163). Her novels interpret and explore, 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 emancipation and liberty by shedding the walls of traditionalism, simplicity and morality leads them to amorous activities. Her novel *Uncertain Liaison* is a collaborative product of

Khushwant Singh and Shobha De. Khushwant Singh has edited this novel. Sex is a dominant theme in it. This novel projects, like almost all of her novels, the pictures of high class people and their society. Extra-marital affairs, rape and unsuccessful married-life is the main theme of the novel. Marriage is not a social issue in these big cities and it is like a property contract which has no association with each others' feeling. In the man dominated-society, men have their relations out of their homes and keep wives only for a social status. These wives live their lives in frustration and there is no other option left for them also but having an extra-marital relation. See in the novel *Uncertain Liaisons* how sex has become the requirement of rich ladies when they say that "sex is no longer the most dreaded and despised two three lettered word in India (De 208).

In the novel *Starry Nights* the protagonist is Asha Rani who is a dark and chubby girl who has to strive to become a star. Her mother pushes her into the act of making the blue –films and this way her mother sells her when Asha was not even in her teens. Asha Rani falls in love with a married actor named Akshay Arora who is already married and she enjoys with him on the bed though she know that he is a married man. She does not care for the sarcastic comments passed by Akshay's wife, Malini. Asha Rani becomes the heartthrob of millions and finds pleasure in men and sex. Not only this, she derives pleasure in destroying men. She uses bed as her weapon to defeat the men. The men who once share bed with her cannot forget her. She successfully copulates with Amar, Kishen Bhai, Akshay Arora, Abhijit, Jay, Jojo and seduces even her father's friend in a plane named Gopalakrishnan. She finds bed as a battle field and tries her best to defeat her sex partner and each time it is she who wins. Men dislike and hate her yet have a desire for her. Asha Rani won each time this battle was fought. Men hated her, despised her yet have a desire for her. She has her sexual-relations with any man of whatever age. Age is no bar for her. She is so sex-starved that she does not spare Amar, a young star almost of her son's age. He is also very passionate to have relations with her since they were together in a movie. Asha Rani herself has recommended his name to the directors to cast him opposite her in that movie. He has the intension to complete the scene which could not be completed in real life. He says in *Starry Nights* (1991), "Look, remember, that scene in our movie- where the director cut to a bolt of lightning just when our lips were to meet? I'm like suffering from continuity problem. Could I.....that is..." (De 29). Asha Rani falls in love with Akshay Arora, a father of two children and turns deaf ears to the abuses of Akshay's wife publically. She is hungry for Akshay and his body. She gets a chance in monsoon when she is going for shooting and comes across Akshay in the traffic. She is so hungry for her that she cancels her program of shooting and persuades Akshay for love-making. Then they both go in Holiday inn to enjoy uninterrupted sex. This love making has been described different from the usual love-making, "Their love making was different. No biting, clawing or frenzied passion. Akshay was gentle and unfrenzied. Asha Rani didn't feel much like a tigress herself. They hardly spoke" (De 102). Amar wishes Asha Rani on her birthday and Akshay requests her to come over and spend the night with her. She does not feel hesitation to his proposal. She welcomes him by wearing a small and youthful T-shirt and tries to seduce him by tugging the neck of her costume off one shoulder. Finally they end up with a having sensual pleasure. She is in love with Akshay Arora and she puts her career of Bollywood at stake to get her love. Her mother protests of her decision for the sake of money which she gets from her career. Asha Rani gets irritated of her mother's decision and says. "Money, money, money. That's all you think of. Well, I'm fed up being your money machine. I've done enough for everybody - you, Sudha and others - now I want to live for

myself” (De 106). Asha Rani is not like a traditional woman who is shy and timid. She initiates in the love-making with Akshay. As men devise various methods to please women, she uses various tricks to excite him and give him the pleasure of sex for which Akshay hovers around her. When Akshay gets bored with her, she has her relationships with the other people she finds like Sheth Amirchand, Linda who is lesbian, Abhijit Mehra who the son of an industrialist, Jojo, the producer of her film and marries a New Zealander named Jamie Phillips (Jay) and has a child with him. But her relationships don’t have a stop here. When she flies back to New Zealand and she meets a man named Gopalakrishnan. She has sex with him in the bathroom of the plane. **Strange Obsession** is the story of the gorgeous young and simple girl, Amrita Aggarwal who has come to Mumbai to fulfill her dream to be a model. But very soon of her arrival in Mumbai, she finds the things changed for herself when one day, she attracts the attentions of a mysterious woman called Meenakshi or Minx who is a lesbian lady. She falls in love with her so passionately that makes her life hell. There are numerous instances of lesbianism in this novel. Minx has sex with Amrita and exploits her. The images of nakedness have been used profusely here in this novel, “She was not wearing the bra. She never did. Amrita had seen her taut nipple through the form-fitting, sweat shirt she frequently wore. Guiding her hand, she traced a line over a jagged scar which began under her breasts and went all the way under the armpit (De 92). There are absolutely such images of sex and nakedness in this novel which are indigestible. Again, “Minx removed her clothes one by one and placed them neatly on the chair close to the bed. Amrita was suddenly conscious, very conscious, of Minx’s touches...She felt her legs open as almost voluntarily as Minx climbed upon her straddling her slim hips with her own, covering her breasts with her hands, cupping the nipples and circling them repeatedly till they ached with a sweet pain (De 97). The uses of gents’ and lady’s private parts stun the reader in the very first reading of the novel.

The novel **Sisters** tells about the sexual obsession of one woman for another. In this novel Shobha De’s women have been described pleasure-seeking women in the company of husbands. Women think that they have all what men expect from them. Shobha de goes to the extent of limitless in portraying the sexism and nude pictures. A newly-wedded wife’s joy on the bed has been depicted by Shobha De in the novel **Sisters**. The honeymoon scene of Mikki and Binny Malhotra has very romantic pictures and the description of breasts brings forth an erotic image in the novel, “He bathed her in a bottle of Chanpaigne, he messaged her with bath oil, he poured a flacon of Joy on her limbs and crushed rose petals between her breasts (De 175). This image of sex is further intensified by the words she used for the portrayal of honeymoon scene, “His expertise and imagination were boundless as he excited her in a hundred different ways, touching, licking, nibbling, sucking..... he turned her over, he stood her up, he had her on all fours, and he even had her upside down with blood rushing in a gush into her head. It was unreal, pleasurable, but also a little frightening” (De 175). After this sexual game Mikki is very happy, “There was no resistance left and she was happy. They had broken all the rules of and every taboo she had ever know[n]. She felt liberated, uninhibited and aroused to the point of primitive abandon” (De175). Miki loves Binny and she is ready to do what her husband likes and what gives him pleasure, “If this was what his man wanted, if this was what made him happy, she would give it to him. She would give him every bit of herself, her body, her mind, her soul. She was in love with her” (De 175). Shobha De describes in this novel that a modern girl gets sex pleasure even before marriage. Mikki gets sexual pleasure from her husband, Binny Malhotra before marriage and after getting sexually satisfied she gets married with him. According to

Shobha De a woman get pleasure even when she is not mentally ready for it and surrenders herself to a man against her wishes. Here is the depiction of this kind of sex in the novel *Sisters* (1992), “Mikki didn’t have time to do anything but savour the myriad physical sensations sweeping over her pliant body as she surrendered to this man who was now her husband. There was no resistance left. And she was happy. And they had broken all the rules and every taboo that she had ever known. She felt liberated, uninhibited and aroused to the point of primitive abandon” (De 175). Shobha De’s novels both *Sultry Days* and *Snapshots* have a dominant theme of sex. De’s women are not limited to their homes but they are the women of the outside world who have tasted the fruit of outer society. Her novel *Sultry Days* is a story of a call-girl named Sujata who has a different nature and she does only what her mind says. She does not think about the society or the social taboos. She follows her natural instincts though she is in her mid forties and makes her own rules. She does not live life according to her husband and thus does what she wants. In this novel on a sultry rainy day Nisha, an impressionable teenager, meets God in the college canteen and falls in love with him but one day God gets angry with her and tells her that “one bitch is as good as another” (De 252).

Shobha De’s women are not again the ordinary women. In her next novel *Snapshots* they have a different way of thinking. In their opinion, sex is not a thing of shame for a lady rather it is a thing to celebrate. This quote from the novel authenticates this statement from her novel, “Sex is no longer the most dreaded and despised three-lettered word in India, is enough to celebrate” (De 3). The women in this novel are not the followers of the rituals, customs and traditions of India. They frankly talk about love and sex by snubbing the sexual morality. They go for their own pleasure, needs and desires. Sexual pleasure has been described as necessary for a woman as food for them. The very first sentence of the novel describes it clearly, “Prem liked to make love in public places” which better describes that women don’t bother of the societal bondages. Talking about beautification of body, enticing the men, sex and its related topics give them immense pleasure. They only talk about the sex, sex and only sex... nothing else. Either they want to live an isolated life free from the patriarchal norms or want to have the company of men to have sex with them to enjoy their lives. Swati, one of the seven friends is of this nature. The women want to be away from their in-laws and so that they may live according their own ways. In the novel *Snapshots*, Reema has physical relationships with her brother-in-law Randhir and she gives him all sexual pleasures when he comes to India from America. But she is not in love with Randhir, she does all this for the sake of sex and pleasure. Nude pictures of love, sex and lust have been depicted in this novel, “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” (De 158). This relationship is not open to her husband as he comes late from his office. Reema is happy over it that her husband comes late so that she can live a free life, the way she wants. About her husband’s late coming Reema says, “Yes, it rather suits me. We have hardly anything to talk about. This way I have the whole day free for myself. I go to the Priyadarshini Park every evening for a long walk. Then I come home and chat on the phone. We plan out our kitty lunches, shopping trips for the next day. What to make for dinner. Holiday plans. It’s much better this way. He’s so tired at night. He finishes his dinner in ten minutes and goes to sleep. On days when I want to watch movies or read, I sleep in the next room” (De 228-9). Swati is a sexy doll who thinks her body as a tool of pleasure. She is

beyond the boundaries of Indian morality or womanly characteristics. She derives pleasure in having sex. This statement of Swati in *Snapshots* makes clear the pictures of nudity and shylessness of Shobha De's women, "We don't dismiss it. We don't find it dirty. Sex doesn't threaten us. I'm not afraid to fuck. I feel sorry for all you women hanging on so desperately to outdated ideas of purity, morality, chastity. It's pathetic" (De 226). In the same novel, Anjali also has her desire to play with the boys with whom she was not attached personally. She says, "His name was Anupam and he was one of many. I mean he wasn't my boyfriend or anything. Just one of the guys I was sleeping with" (Snapshots 134).

Shobha De's women want sex as they want food. In other words, sex is food for them. Sexual desire of males is satisfied inside and outside of house and women live under the four walls of the houses in traditional society but Shobha De's women enjoy sex less inside and more outside. Bashkir A. Shula in his article, "Shobha De: The Writer and Feminism" asserts, "According to Shobha De, all people need sex. It is something special, something beautiful, something shared. The woman would get sex on her own terms now" (Shula 211). Their suffering makes them to conclude that marriage and all human relationships are just ridiculous. Shivika Verma appreciates De's way of expression and the style she presents her thoughts in her works, "As a writer she is gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. That's why she narrates each and every aspect of human life tactfully. The way she narrates each and every aspect of human relationships is really wonderful" (Verma 191). To Shobha De sex is a natural phenomenon. She elevates the sex to a status of an art or a religion. Shobha De's views through her character are very antithetical in nature when she finds region or piety in sex, "Sex is not filthy ...our mind makes it so. Look at Khajuraho, Konark...have any of you studied the Kama Sutra? Fascinating. It is a pity, we got brainwashed by some frustrated, repressed idiots. I think sex is a celebration—the highest form of religion (De 115). Conclusively it can be sad that Shobha De is a multi-faceted novelist who is much sensitive towards her society and tries to pen down what she sees in the society in which she lives and works. She has given the all kind of taste in her novels through her different female characters. But one thing is common to all these female characters and that is their unsatisfactory married or love life. They are not satisfied what they have and want more and more in search of pleasure. Shudhir Kumar has summed up about her in these words, "Shobha De has been labeled as evergreen queen [of] pornography, a master of "pulp fiction", "a vamp of feminist ideas", "an experimenter of feminism" or a mere peddler of pornographic fiction" (Kumar 140).

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