

Feminism and the Politics of Homosexuality in Shobhaa De's *Starry Nights*

¹Mrs. Meena Priya R, ²Dr. C. Chithra

¹ Part-Time Research Scholar, (Reg.No: MKU23PFOL10958), Department of English and Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625021

Email: priya.meena1630@gmail.com

²Associate Professor of English, N.M.S.S.V.N. College, Nagamalai, Madurai – 625019

Email: cchithrasvnc1966@gmail.com

Abstract

Shobha De has been a journalist in Bombay for many years, thus she has seen a lot of the metropolitan lifestyles and minds of the ladies who live there. So, she knows a lot about how it is shown. The same part of a woman's mind. Before she becomes a famous actress, Asha Rani is Viji, the daughter of a movie tycoon who is not very good at raising her. She falls in love with Akshay Arora, who is married, but he cheated on her. Barua's story also talks about her first time being with Linda as a lesbian. Their connection was just as talkative because Abhijit is married and had children. She marries Jamie Phillips and they have a daughter named Sasha together in New Zealand. She has an affair with Jojo when she is in India and he loathes her. Asha Rani, a famous movie star, has a rise and collapse in *Starry Nights*. She will always work in the Bombay film industry. She relies on the movie business and keeps working in it, even if it's not as a heroine but as a producer.

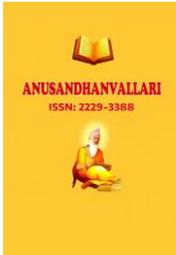
Keywords: Tradition, modernity, relationships, survival and post modernism

Introduction

Indian English fiction has evolved to portray not only societal truths but also the hidden adversities encountered by women inside a patriarchal context. Shobhaa De is a modern writer because she is a brave and controversial novelist who writes openly about the problems of city life, notably the Bollywood film business. Her works talk about the sexual politics, exploitation and commodification that women suffer in a world where males are in charge. In her novel *Starry Nights*, the primary character is Aasha Rani, a country girl who becomes a Bollywood star. Producers, underworld bosses and even her own mother utilize her, treat her like an item and mistreat her. The novel is a metaphor for how women in society where men are in charge have to battle for their sense of self and not be perceived as objects of desire.

Discussion

Shobha De's novels show what life is like for women in cities in India. She always writes about the lives of women who work in the media, movies, or advertising. It's really intriguing to learn about the women that work in one of these areas. In an interview with Asia Week, she says: "The women in my novel are not doormats." They don't want to be pushed around. The women of De work in the media and movies, therefore De's depictions of these colorful worlds reflect the hidden truths of women's lives. The lives of women are portrayed in relation to their psychology, careers, oppression, psychological traumas and sexual urges. The excessive use of sexual themes may induce discomfort; nonetheless, her candid narration and the central issue of the novel impart a distinctive personality to her work. Some of the issues that Shobha De writes about are searching for identity, cultural shifts, insecurity, feminism, lesbianism, liberalization, disorientation, realism, tradition and modernity



and fragmentation. J.M. Waghmare points out: “Indeed, the woman’s body is much abused. Shobhaa De’s writing conveys the feeling of bitter helplessness. She cannot call even her body her own. She is an object of man’s lust and sexuality. She has nowhere to go. She is confined to the four corners of the house” (62).

The female characters in Shobha De’s novels are the main characters and the tale is about them. Her novels are mostly about how women’s identities change in that society. The woman who lives in the city wants to do something with her life. But love, marriage and sex ruin their dreams. Shobha De does a great job of showing how the characters, who come from middle-class families, want to get ahead in life. At first, the women in Shobha De are naive, but as they learn more about life, they figure out what it really means. Shobha De is really good at showing how the women characters grow and change. It is essential to acknowledge that Shobha De consistently articulates feminist themes in her writings.

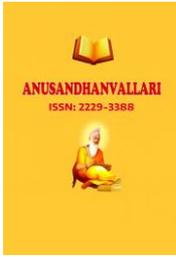
Shobha De’s *Starry Nights* tells the story of Aasha Rani, a movie actress who grows up in a rural hamlet and moved to Bombay. Rani works hard to get away from her small-town life. She responds favorably to prostitution with famous actors, producers, directors, heroes and cameramen in the movie business. At no point in the story does she fight back. She takes risks to blend in with other people. A long list of misfortunes, the pressures of life and an unpleasant marriage don’t bother her much. She has a great vision for the future that she shares with her daughter, like a phoenix rising from the ashes of the past. It concludes on a good note. So, De’s feminism is both more aware and responsible. She doesn’t end the rest of her life with a tone of despair and sadness; instead, she does it with the same zeal as the fabled bird Phoenix.

In *Starry Nights*, the terrifying meeting between Aasha Rani and her uncle shows how the male-centered and male-controlled value system works. The female protagonist’s resistance to victimization and oppression is expressed through several enduring ideological frameworks. Like her heroes, her life is full of disappointments, mental breakdowns and disasters. This vamp feminism is bad for looks, but it is good for the economy. The majority of the female protagonists in De’s work appear to prioritize economic empowerment as a means to combat entrenched sexism in society.

Asha Rani’s experience as a gay person in the movie *Starry Nights*. Linda helped Asha Rani by giving her love, support and comfort. Because she doesn’t want to be a lesbian, the novel doesn’t call her one. This essay looks at Asha Rani’s sexual behavior and mental state instead of her physical persona. Shobha De’s *Strong Obsession* is about a lesbian character who is obsessed. Minx turned out to be a lesbian because of her Electra complex. Because she hasn’t done well in life, she hangs out with bad individuals. She switches genders and starts to hate her dad. It was driven by rage and worry about how dishonest men are.

Shobhaa De is one of India’s most controversial and outspoken novels. She often writes about sex, gender and how people act hypocritically in society. *Starry Nights* causes a stir in the literary world because it honestly shows the Bollywood industry and the problems women face trying to get by in its glamorous but exploitative world. The story is about Aasha Rani, a movie star whose rise to fame is full of betrayal, shame and mental pain. A lot of people read the novel as a criticism of patriarchy and the way women are treated as objects. However, it also works as a psychoanalytic reading. This shows the unconscious forces that affect Aasha Rani’s decisions and problems. This research utilizes the psychoanalytic frameworks of Freud, Lacan, Kristeva and Chodorow to examine the influence of trauma, repression and desire on Aasha Rani’s identity in *Starry Nights*.

The novel shows how hard it is for newcomers to make it in the Bollywood film industry. *Starry Nights* the novel is also a true picture of the movie world, with all of its falsehoods, glitter, screams and sexual abuse. So, Shobhaa De’s novel *Starry Nights* shows what New Women are like who are trying to find themselves in the Bollywood film industry. *Starry Nights* is split into two parts. The first half is about Aasha Rani, the love of millions and the ups and downs in her life. The second part is about her failed marriage. In a patriarchal society,



women are oppressed and taken advantage of, as shown by the characters Aasha Rani, Geetha Devi, Malini and Rita. Men hurt them in some way or another. They are not only oppressed, humiliated and subordinated in the film industry, but also outside of it. Geetha Devi, Aasha Rani's mother, has a lot of challenges and troubles in this novel because her husband left her. She keeps fighting against deficiency while taking care of her daughter. She had to work as a prostitute to help her family and pay for Aasha Rani's dance tuition.

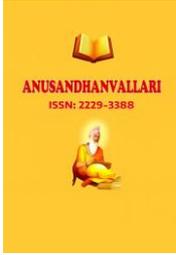
Living in slums, she has to move ahead through various afflictions and undergo humiliation and exploitation. She is gentle and obedient by character; as a result, she is menaced, maltreated, disregarded and finally desolated by her husband. Geetha Devi is also brutally beaten by Girija, whom her husband intended to marry. While glancing at the photo album of her mother's images, Aasha Rani remembers the prior bitter experiences:

Piecing amma's life together, Aasha Rani knew more or less what had happened. How appa had lost interest in her. How Girija had humiliated her and called her a common prostitute. How appa had abruptly cut off all money, leaving amma with no choice but to sell all her jewellery - and the clothes off her back. That was when the nightmare had begun. Moving out of their luxurious bungalow and into some ugly place in an overcrowded, filthy area (SN 92).

Geetha Devi's shame and pain show how much all women are experiencing. Even though she is still a good wife and can be seen as a typical Indian woman who is dealing with the matter quietly. Malini, Akshay's wife, is very different from Geetha Devi. Malini is shown as the modern lady who yells and sues Aasha Rani for cheating on her husband. She is ready to do anything and everything to get her spouse back. Aasha Rani's life story shows that women have to struggle for their rights and survival in a society where men are in charge. Aasha Rani had to deal with a lot of troubles as a youngster because she didn't have enough food and her parents didn't love her or protect her mentally. Moreover, her uncle sexually abused her because she didn't feel safe with her father.

Shobhaa De's novel on new women with changing roles is a remarkable producer. Aasha Rani loves Akshay Arora, who is married, but he has also hurt her. Geeta Barua also talked about her first time being with Linda as a lesbian. Aasha Rani's affair with Abhijit was also very talkative because he was married and had a wife and children. She marries Jamie Phillips and is happy with him in New Zealand. They have a daughter named Sasha. In India, she has an affair with Jojo, who also hated her. In short, *Starry Nights* is about the rise and fall of Aasha Rani, a famous movie star who never leaves the world of Bombay films. She can't get enough of the movie business and stays in it, even if she's not a star. She works as a producer instead. Shobhaa De writes soft porn. She shows a scary lack of respect for the rules of morality and decency that are common in a patriarchal society.

In *Starry Nights*, Shobhaa De eloquently depicts Aasha Rani's harrowing encounter with her uncle, illustrating the facades of a male-dominated and male-controlled societal value system. Umesh Nana Wamane points out: "completely concern with their own rights being women; still they become victims of male dominated society" Shobhaa De's heroine stands up against this huge persecution and victimization that has been going on for a long time throughout history, philosophy, culture and the arts. The lives of her heroines are equally full with problems, mental breakdowns and calamities. So, this Vamp feminism is awful for looks, but it's fantastic for business. Kumar Sudhir says: "Shobhaa De is a soft-porn writer. She flaunts a frightening flippancy in flagrantly flouting the conventional canons of morality and decency prevalent in the patriarchal social order" (145)



Conclusion

Feminism, lesbianism and homosexuality are emergent postmodern notions referenced in Shobha De's novels. The world of women is nicely shown with excessive sexual urges. Shobha De's woman is brave enough to deal with problems in her life. It is clear that her women care about both their personal lives and their marriages. So she is willing to give up her identity as a married lady in order to get forward in her own goals. So Shobha De showed that she was a postmodern writer in terms of her subject matter, style, attitude and language.

Works Cited

- [1] De, Shobha. *Starry Nights*, Penguin, 1991.
 - [2] Iyar V. "Shobha De: making of the novelist," *Changing faces of new woman: Indian writing in English*. Adhyayan Publishers and Distributors; 2012.
 - [3] Kumar S. "Artist as vamp: a feminist approach to *Starry Nights*." *The fiction of Shobha De*. Prestige; 2000.
 - [4] Waghmare NJ. *Critical essays on Indian women writing in English*. Harmann Publication House; 1999.
- Wamane, Umesh Nana. "LESBIAN FEMINISM, EROTICISM AND SEXUALITY IN SHOBHA DE'S STARRY NIGHT AND MANJU KAPUR'S MARRIED WOMAN: A CRITIQUE". *Epitome : International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2018. <https://www.epitomejournals.com> ›