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The Emerging Trends in Indian Writing in English with Special Reference to Shobha De

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Abstract:

The paper focuses on the emerging trends in Indian writing in English with special reference to Shobha De. During the seventy years of its effective history Indian writing in English crossed many milestones and has come to be finally accepted as a major literature of the world.

Keywords: Indian Writing in English, Fiction, journalist, linguistics.

Introduction:

Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand tried their best to give new identity to Indian Writing in English. Actually speaking it is gratifying that the 'Big Three' have lost none of their authenticity and appeal in the eighties, although their distinctive earlier works appeared in the thirties. Moreover, a new group of writers have arrived on the Indian scenario, for example - Anita Desai, Chaman Nahal, Kamala Markandaya, Arun Joshi, Dina Mehta, Salman Rushdie, Shobha De and the Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly remarks: "When an Indian writer of fiction uses a learnt second language like English, he is actually recording a kind of half-conscious translation (from mother tongue into English) that has taken place in the mind. Most of our writers are bi-lingual, some equally proficient in English and the mother tongue, and some more in one than in the other. The background and the situations are usually Indian but the characters may often be drawn from bilingual milieus. The need for expressing the values verities and heartbeats of one culture in the language of another poses its own problems and there is doubtless the inner urge to render in English the rhythms, idiosyncrasies, images, idioms and proverbs of the local speech." Thus one of the most outstanding characteristics of Indian writing in English is that the background is Indian and the language though foreign has adopted itself to the needs of the Indians. Today Indian English as well as Indian writing in English has got its own identity. Actually speaking the most interesting aspect of the fiction at the turn of the present century from the Indian point of view is the emergence of new talent. A number of recent Indian novelists have produced significant novels, making a mark in the literary world. However, on reading Shobha De's novels, one can get some idea about the changing trends in Indian writing in English.

She began a career in journalism in 1970 in the course of which she founded and edited three popular magazines - 'Stardust', 'Society' and 'Celebrity' and was consulting editor to 'Sunday' and 'Megacity'. In 1988 she wrote her first novel - the best-selling 'Socialite Evenings' and, so far, has in all published seven novels. Shobha De has been many things to many people: super model, celebrity journalist and best-selling author of intellectual prose writings and popular novels; friend, rival, colleague and confidante. In her latest publication 'Selective Memory: Stories from my life' (1998, Penguin Books, New Delhi) one comes across her engagingly candid memoir, a woman who has been a familiar face and name to millions (although few know her) and where she finally reveals the true self behind the public persona.

Insiders know that despite her commitment to work and the frantic pace of her life, Shobha De's first priority in life has always been her family.

Shobha De's high voltage career 'happened' in unexpected ways, started with her unplanned entry as a teenager into the glamorous world of modeling, and moving on to her high-profile years as a magazine editor, columnist, social commentator, TV scriptwriter and author. In these 'avatars' she keenly observed and astutely chronicled the new India - brash, affluent and ambitious. High-society hi-jinks, movie-star follies, celebrity neuroses - none of these escaped her unsparing eye. In addition to her novel writing, Ms De has also been a model, a film journalist, an editor of magazines and a popular columnist. It is always interesting as well as necessary to take into account the different aspects of writing of any writer because it helps us understand that writer and we can give a better justice to him or her, as the writing is concerned. Though the present research is about the themes, techniques and style of Ms De's novels, to study in brief her other literary aspects would certainly enlighten us to give justice to her. Starting her career as a model, as a film journalist, as an editor of popular magazines and as a columnist, the world of experience of Ms De is quite rich, varied and extremely fascinating. Her novels bring to our notice characters, incidents, episodes of different kinds of men and women who appear to be real but at the same time foggy and rather thin.

Shobha De's journey from a model, film journalist, column writer to fiction writer is very thrilling and interesting. It is necessary to see how the persona of Shobha De developed step by step. Any great person's character – building is assessed from the roots. Yet, Ms. De's biography is not written by any writer. But we have more authentic life-story narrated by Ms De herself in her autobiography(?): *Selective Memory –Stories From My Life*. It is a matter of dispute whether *Selective Memory* is an autobiography or not because the very title of the book suggests that there are only selective memories from her life. She has omitted some memories, which she does not wish to share with the readers and critics. But after reading *Selective Memory*, one gets sufficient stuff from the book to know the real self of Shobha De. Here, the efforts are not to evaluate the book. The intention is only to present the important aspects of a versatile personality of Shobha De. One can divide her saga into five sections: Shobha De as a model, as a film journalist and columnist, as an editor of magazines, as an intellectual prose writer and as a novelist.

While on the way becoming model, Shobha faced many strange people and strange events. She was youngest of the women chosen and had to model exquisite Banarasi Sarees. It was a kind of ego trip. One of them was a wealthy married socialite. It was an opportunity for the lady to display her splendid body. The location was Delhi and Agra. During this campaign Shobha De experienced an ugly side of the modeling business, for example, wine-drinking women and keeping illicit relations. One of them even went away with costly Banarasi saree, which was borrowed from the shop. She saw beauty queens with dirty toenails and ramp mannequins with oily pigtailed. Though she was the part of this world, she did not belong to it. She remained on its fringes, watching, laughing and learning. It was possible then to work in that artificial, almost unreal environment without losing one's perspective or a sense of humour. Other girls concentrated on becoming swans while Shobha chose to be a down. It was hard for her to take modeling business seriously, because she did not see herself as a sleek, sexy, soignée creature of collective fantasy. She did not possess the prerequisites for such a high visibility job, as she thought that time.

Any literary work is examined in terms of its theme and style. The theme is the subject or the meaning of a work. It can also be explained in terms of its style. Broadly, 'style' is the writer's manner of presenting his ideas to thoughts and feelings. It is also defined as the overall effect

of a literary work. This effect is the result of the interplay of sentence structure, vocabulary, figures of speech, rhythm and many other stylistic features. A researcher has to identify the elements of style, to analyze them to show their structural significance and finally inter-relate them to suggest their total meaning.

Broadly, novel falls into a category of 'prose' though it is essentially dramatic. It creates a world through action, dialogues and images. It is centered in a narrative. A novel is a work of imagination. It presents a fictional world in such a way as to make us feel that it is a real one. So novel is both, fantasy and truth. In it an artist forms, from the chaos of everyday life, a work that is ordered and aesthetically satisfying. In the process he distorts time and compresses or eliminates many details from commonplace experience. He selects events and people and organizes them to illustrate what he believes to be truth. As such, a novel comprises of setting, mood, story and characterization.

Mainly, novels falls in the following categories: (1) descriptive, (2) explanatory and (3) emotive. The novelist describes actions, people, things and places. The novels of Shobha De fall into 'descriptive' category. The style can be categorized as: "(1) pompous and pretentious, (2) simpler, but little sentimental, (3) plain and brief in which the writer's feelings are not directly indicated, and (4) employs a slangy, colloquial style". (p. 1)2 However, the inclination of stylistics towards linguistics constitutes its contemporary identity as a near independent study. It is here that we have to relate it to the Prague Linguistic Circle and the revolution in linguistics associated with Saussure and Charles Bally. Russian Formalism looked upon a literary work as a 'structure' made up of 'devices' such as phonetic patterns, rhyme, rhythm, metre. Its 'literariness' constituted its uniqueness. Hence a work of verbal art 'defamiliarizes' or makes strange the stale and jaded perception of life. However, for the formalists art is an autonomous and self-reflexive activity.

It depends on an individual what style he or she should apply while writing a novel. Indian female writers have followed the traditional way of writing. But Shobha De, a post-Independence woman novelist, has applied her own style while writing her seven novels. (1)'Socialite Evenings' (2) 'Starry Nights' (3) 'Sisters' (4) 'Strange Obsession' (5)'Snapshots' (6) 'Sultry Days' and (7) 'Second Thoughts'.

It is clear that Ms De's style is her own. It means her style is direct, forceful and she calls a spade a spade. She has her own knack of depicting people, events and places. Barring her fifth novel 'Sultry Days', other six novels have exotic settings, characters and places. Only 'Sultry Days' is located in Bombay. Beginning her career as a model, film journalist and prose writer has helped her create her own space in the Indian writing in English, particularly, novels. For being a successful writer one requires tremendous command on language, while he/she is going to write. Shobha De, though B.A. in psychology, has tremendous command on English. Her keen understanding of human nature, her rich world of experience and her penetrating eyesight in the facts and persons have helped her develop her style. Her style is path-breaking. Not only her style but her themes are also path-finders which try to explore human mind, especially the woman mind. Let us have some examples of her vivid depictions. Deb in 'Sultry Days' says to Nisha, " 'I' m a seedha sadha fellow, you know that. Give me my daal roti, a warm-bed, twice-a-week maalish and a daily screw. That is all I expect. So tell me are you interested? (p.160)4

Sometimes the writer becomes sentimental in her use of language. For example, in 'Socialite Evenings', she describes the mental condition of Karuna after her divorce. She comes to her parents, who are old now and none is there to take care of them : "They needed me. And I

needed them. They did not have a son to look after them in their old age. They had the enormous burden of an invalid daughter to cope up. Each day in their life was a major struggle to just get on with the living that remained. How could I abandon them at this point?" (p. 271).⁶ Here one sees a different Shobha De than the De who is known for her spicy language that describes sexy people and their sex activities. In her second novel, 'Starry Nights', there are many obscene descriptions.

This is the description of Asha Rani. Here the style is clear and bare. No curtain. No pretension, neither on the part of the author nor on the part of her characters. That is the style of Shobha De. Her descriptions of sex acts are not enclosed in bed-rooms only. She can describe her men and women copulating anywhere, say the toilette -Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce of plane (as in the 'Starry Nights') or cabin of the office (as in the 'Sisters') or a back seat of a car (as in the 'Socialite Evenings'). This is the style of Shobha De !

Shobha De is an expert in depicting both: the inner as well as the outer mind of her characters. She has deep knowledge of human psyche, especially-women psyche, as she herself is B.A. in psychology. As the author she is herself a globe-trotter, her novels also have a global touch. The setting of her novels is exotic. There are exotic places, people, food items and various brands of wines and cigarettes. If a list is made of the names of food items used by her in all her novels, it will make a menu-card of a five-star hotel. That is the same case with wines, cigarettes and various designer clothes. This is so because her characters belong to a five-star category. One can find character like Deb, 'beedee-smoking', wearing poor kurta-pyjama and speaking slangy language, only in 'Sultry Days'.

As Shobha De describes various characters making love and sex, talking sex, she uses that type of lingo. Nothing is behind curtain. She calls a spade a spade. Some critics say that its 'cunt and cock' lingo. Let it be as it is. But it is a fact that people use such language in the day-to-day conversation. While using such language, the author successfully creates real characters. Here are some of the words e.g. –'saala', 'bewakuf', 'hijda' 'bindaas', 'chalu', 'part your-legs' and 'haraami'. These are desi words, which have been used in English by the author. That is 'Hinglish', a word coined by De herself. With this lingo, the author is successful in creating the effect. It is her style that has made her a popular fictionist. Shobha De has a special knack to describe places. In 'Second Thoughts' she describes Bombay and Calcutta: "Bombay smells well so did Calcutta but it was a different smell. Besides she was used to that particular stench. Bombay smelt of desperation and deceit". (p.1)⁸ Or "Maya took a few tentative steps forward and recoiled in horror. She had almost tripped over a figure lying prone on the platform. She looked down to see it was a man, and he was dead. None of the thousands of people nonchalantly walking past the corpse so much as paused." (Prologue). Here the author uses figure of speech personification. Bombay is personified as an emotionless metro where careless citizens live. In the same novel, the author makes use of another figure of speech-metaphor. As Maya is talking to her neighbor Pushpa, the soup, which she was cooking spills on the stove in the kitchen. Her husband reprimands Maya. At this time Maya ponders: "My entire body was shaking with mirth. The more I stared at the spilled soup, the funnier I found it. I knew I would have to make it again from the scratch. So what? I have all the time in the world now". (p 289)⁹

This incident provides a beautiful metaphor. The soup is spilled (her affair with Nikhil is broken as he is engaged to a Delhi girl). She will cook another soup (It means that she will make another affair with any other Nikhil or Shakeel because now she has all the time in the world. Once Nikhil initiated her in extra-marital relationship there may not be Nikhil, she will carry on with anyone available.

Shobha De exposes not only the minds of her characters but also their bodies. She depicts naked minds with naked bodies. This could be done only by De because it is De's diction and style. The heroines of 'Second Thoughts', 'Sultry Days' and 'Socialite Evenings' - Maya, Nisha and Karuna respectively narrate their own stories. This narration is made acutely and pointedly by the author. Sometimes her characters become her mouth pieces. As if De herself is speaking through their mouths. For example, a conversation is going on between Swati and Aparna in 'Snapshots'. Swati comments: "sex isn't filthy, our minds make it so. Look at Khajuraho, Konark...have any of you studied 'Kamsutra'? Fascinating. It is a pity we got brainwashed by some frustrated, repressed bigots. I think sex is a celebration-the highest form of religion". (p.164)¹⁰

In this way there are many incidents that the author speaks through her characters while discussing various social, political, marital, male-female and filmy issues. While writing any novel, as there are seven to her credit, Shobha De puts her soul into it. She writes from head as well as from heart. So her style becomes direct, forceful, brief, clear and bare. And hence it is also explosive.

As the name of the author is Shobha which begins with the letter "S", so the titles of her all novels begin with the same letter – "S": 'Socialite Evenings', 'Starry Nights', 'Sisters', 'Strange Obsession', 'Snapshots', 'Sultry Days' and 'Second Thoughts'. To have a passion for a particular letter is also the style of the author as if she is possessed by "S" letter.

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