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Apparent of New Woman in Shobhaa De's *Snapshot*

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Abstract:

Over the past few millennia, the image of women in India has taken many changes, because of modernity. Today women have started realizing their potential, status and rights in the family and in the society. They are equally potential enough to men and so are competitors to them, in every street of life.

However the emergence of new woman is widely spread all over the world and thereby she is confident, assertive and independent in all the way. At the same time the other traits of new women is, she also faces various stresses and strains such as sexual harassment, gang rape, molestation and sense of insecurity. Whatever it is, the woman has an urge to create a full space for her as she is very conscious of her independent identity.

The oppression and suppression upon woman have been thrown away gradually and she has tried to fit herself into the centre of wheel. Infact, the upcoming woman is very ambitious and so she doesnot depend on any man. She builds herself with multi-skills and thus walks in every field of society. In this way literature is also one field where women could openly find their voices of writing equally as men. In fact there are many works which depicted various images of new woman. In this way, how Shobhaa De's *Snapshot* brings out the new 'avathar' of woman that takes place in various forms of family life cycle is the main focus of this conceptual paper. It also further analyses or dissects or disseminates how and in what ways the woman is new.

Keywords: Modernity, educated, independent, various roles.

There are many Indian women novelists such as Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Namitha Gokhale, Anitha Desai, Bharathi Mukherjee, Shobhaa De etc who occupied a special place in the history of Indian English Fiction, to deal with the issue of new woman. These women novelists changed their subjectivity into a new outlook and showed in their own perspectives as how new modern women rejected or modified the patriarchal pattern who thereby exposed their real potential to fulfill their needs.

However, though the characters of the other women writers hold the label of new woman, Shobhaa De's women characters strike difference. If other writers show new women as liberated, on the other side, they also show as how like traditional women, new woman also tolerates, adjusts to her family and never changes her basic personality. But Shobhaa De's women are extremely powerful than men and mould their personality according to their needs. Her women characters are in no way flexible to male world and change the male dominance system. They also solve their problem by themselves and stand as a model to the entire community of women.

In fact most of De's novels indicate the arrival and changes with new Indian women who are eager to fight rebelliously against the patriarchal social system. To justify all this, here *Snapshot* dissects to reveal out how the modern new women are sexually free and thereby trying to create a revolution in the family sphere by attaining power to reach the equal role with men. *Snapshot* also gives a voice about the journey of six modern women characters who took sex as a weapon and fought for their power and supremacy and also went in search of their space or self-identity to attain equal balance in the family.

The novel *Snapshot* revolves around the get-together of six schoolmates Aparna, Reema, Surekha, Rashmi, Noor and Swathi from Santa Maria High School, Mumbai, who reminiscence over their past event to catch up their old times. Swathi who resided in London was asked to write a series about the Indian urban women of nineties. So she planned to meet all her school friends, in a party at Reema's home. In spite of various problems and hatred, Swathi, Aparna, Noor, Surekha and Rashmi joined the party. In their reunion each discussed their pre and post marital life and gave a touch to their memory. As they discussed, all their dark secrets were revealed and finally the party turned nightmarish, by ending with the suicide of Noor.

Though there are six women characters in the novel, Swathi stands as the main protagonist of the novel. However each woman character attains equal note of playing their role and remains most interesting and influencing than the male characters. For an instance, incidents of few characters will try to reveal and strand out how powerful and new, the women are in their own way.

The novel opens in Goa with Prem and Aparna's intriguing relationship. Aparna being the boss of Ad-Company is very much attracted to Prem, who is with high ideals and ambition. So she pays him enough money and with fair deal they maintain their affair. Prem as a creative director shows his creativity even in creating sensation within Aparna. So whenever Aparna spends time with him, she feels more of physical hunger that makes her forget the bitterness of her past life with her husband Rohit. But a sudden spark of recollection of her husband Rohit makes her to think of as how she ditches her, leaves her lonely and goes away from her. So she feels comfortable that the loneliness is now filled by Prem. In fact, though she does not have real love for Prem, it is only through him she discovers her sexual potential.

Infact, Aparna tries to justify that as her husband Rohit has not given her love, care and tenderness, for which she has longed have been satisfied by Prem. This is what happens to most of the modern women. When a man fails to do his duty to protect the woman, she also fails to follow the traditional shell. Generally if a man deserts his wife, she gets responsibility to take care of herself. So in order to survive, she goes to work, to protect her. Over there she undergoes various humiliations in the male world and meets lots of ups and downs of experience that makes her finally to realize that she can never lead her life within the prescribed customs of society. So a woman like Aparna goes out of the shell to look in for her need and gets satisfied, when her needs are met.

Through Aparna, it is understood that, it is the situation that is making modern women to shatter the traditional shell. Though Aparna adjusts and sacrifices her life for Rohit, he fails to understand her and leaves her into doom. This sort of bitterness creates an awakening and turns

women like Aparna as a new woman. Besides there is no one to control or guide her, so she leads her life as she wishes, by smoking, drinking champagne and having extra sexual relationship. She also gets an urge of spirit to lead her individual life and hence breaks out the entire traditional notion that blocks her way and there by fights to survive her individual life in a better way.

The next character is Rashmi. She is a trained actress who is always busy with her schedule. Just like western women, she calms herself by having wine, cigarette and sex. Rashmi is a woman who holds man by her bed. She says, “No man had ever walked away from Rashmi’s bed. Not till she gave the orders to march” (SS, 52). But she is annoyed and wondered, when Pips an actor, goes away from her. Pips is a perfectionist who adopts new styles according to the trend and is admired by most women. In this way, when Rashmi is attracted to him, he says he is a man who uses the girl and will leave the girl for which she accepts to maintain it, to have fun. Infact both make a record because, both are hungry of bed companions. So “they stayed in bed, ate in bed, fucked in bed and hardly stirred out of the place” (SS, 54). Both are together for nearly six months and maintain their relationship just for sex.

The novelist tries to show how like men, modern woman too accepts to have free sex, without any objection, shyness or women’s sensibility. However even in our culture sex is given importance as it is one among the objectives of human life. To justify this context, one instance is quoted from our scriptures where “Kama” is given importance and described as, “Being the cause of the body, sex satisfaction is as useful as food. It cannot be denounced. As for sustenance and strength of the body, food is essential, likewise for health, sex. (46)” In this way one cannot consider Rashmi as an immoral woman. She feels that she can bring men under her control only through bed and so uses sex as her only power.

The novelist, here once again indicates that if men dominate women in any sense, women can control them in bed. Generally it is men who get pleasures by wielding power and money and sometimes even by beating and hitting wives. But whereas De suggests that even in sex, power and pleasure must be equally shared and hence makes her women as sexually independent new women, who throw away the morality, propriety and dignity into dustbin.

Reema gets married to Ravi Nath and discovers on her very first day itself that she has been married to a wrong person, as he is weak in sex; this leaves her into cold of both in physical and emotional level. In addition Ravi also spends most of his time in money making and leaves Reema into loneliness that greatly disappoints her. So the emptiness within the couple provides a lot of scope for Reema to be independent that leads her even to have extra illicit relationship with Randhir, her brother-in-law.

Through Reema, the novelist brings out how the woman is starved sexually. Though Reema wished to live as an ideal wife, Ravi fails to understand his wife’s needs and her desire for freedom. So she shows her anger against men and leads a life of her own whims and fancies, without any consideration or concern of family’s honour, dignity and restriction.

The next woman is Noor. She is a kind, harmless, artistic and dreamy one who respects everyone. She is having a loveless life with her parents is guided by her elderly maid servant Nani.

Later when Noor goes in a motorcycle along with her lover Amir, she meets with an accident that pushes her into coma and makes her to undergo sufferings, both physically and mentally. Slowly she recovers and yet the loneliness gives her more disturbances. Noor had an unusual and abnormal relationship with Nawaz, her brother to avoid the loneliness. She convinces herself and enjoys with him. She never bothers about what relationship they are, as his touch filled her loneliness and gives her a new world. She says, "It seemed to suit Nawaz just fine. Almost every night he'd slide into Noor's large and airy bedroom and get under the sheets with her. She welcomed his arrival, moving over to make room for him under the light soft mulmulrazai. She loved so much. She enjoyed his light touch, the assured groping and the final intimacy of his body becoming one with hers" (SS, 168). But this happiness did not continue for long, as Swathi interrupts in their relationship.

Through Noor, De brings out the unacceptable relationship, yet in no way she picturises any imaginative character as De depicts the reality of the westernized way of life in India. Today, one can witness in the day to day newspapers, the Freudian complex characters like daughter and father, son and mother, brother and sister, Father-in-law and Daughter-in-law etc who are wandering freely. Generally in western side, people have no restriction to have sex with the person, they think, because they are given freedom and sexual independence. So in this way, Noor being desperate and desolated utilizes the freedom of loneliness by having an affair with her own brother and lives in her own world.

Even one can understand through Noor that these sorts of characters grow in our society because of uncaring and irresponsible parents. When parents are careless in bringing up their children they witness a bad example. In this way what, De is trying to assert is clearly indicated in Chaankya Neeta as,

Those parents are like enemies of their own children who did not educate them (girls), for they will prove unworthy and unfit for the human society just like that of the crane in the mid of the swamy and a dumb-fool in the mid of the eminent erudite. (2/11)

Surekha is also bored of her life by living with the same man, since the marriage is done. She longs for different sensation and touches or at least a different method from her husband. But feels very bored as she exclaims as, "Imagine not knowing any other body, any other feeling, and any other sensation. Forever sounds terrible. Like eating datchaval day in and day out (SS, 209)". Surekha hates the same routine nature of life with her husband. It is like doing the same thing repeatedly that creates a hatred towards her husband. New women like Surekha, Rashmi hates not only the joint family system but they also fails to know the value of marriage life. The only need and interest is to enjoy and live a liberated life.

Surekha as she longs for different touches, maintains lesbian relationship with Dolly, who is her school friend. As Surekha's Mother-in-law often watches her, she has no chance of meeting any man. So she feels that Dolly can satisfy her sexual needs and so both enjoyed happily. Even when Dolly's parents insisted her to get married, she refuses it. But Surekha gets married and trickily plans saying that marriage will hide their relationship, so that no one can get suspect of their mutual relationship.

The novelist though has given a graphic description of erotic pleasures with unnatural sexes that cannot be accepted by our social laws yet these are happening in our Indian society. However, even the girls, Surekha and Dolly know that these sorts of practices cannot be accepted in India, yet they are not concerned about it because they think that individual happiness is very necessary and so they do not bother about any social laws or comments by others. Both, Surekha and Dolly, gets satisfied by having variant sexual behaviour, so this makes Dolly more firm as not to get married, as she gets the fleshy warmth, security, love and course of sexual pleasure from Surekha. Also they will be very free from men, as there is no domination.

The above instance characters clearly indicates, that the new women by breaking away all the customs and social laws, go on their way, as they think their individual pleasure or happiness is more important than the other objectives. New women also wish to lead an independent and superior life. They also hate being dominated by men and thus break their marital life, very casually. Modern women also hate to lead a lonely life. So they seek company by whoring with various men. Following westernized life style they break away all the Indian qualities and thus give priority to money and materialistic needs. In short a new woman outdates old ideas of purity, morality and chastity and acts as a symbol of westernized liberated woman, who acts freely.

Generally, an Indian woman lives within several social taboos. At the same time, their emotional need must also be released. But when there is an absence of proper concern for them they suffer from the inner fragmentation. Especially when the pressure of work and ambition to earn more money makes men busy and as well incapable of sharing their emotions with their wife, ultimately the marital relationship turns into mechanical relationship. As a result of this women undergo various suffering. So men take advantage of the women's loneliness, ignorance and frustration and uses them to their need, finally they are sexually exploited. But De's New Women are assertive and self-willed. They do not want to worry or demand to fulfill their emotions. They enjoy by watching blue films, talking of open sex freely and of their physical structures like boobs and tits sizes. This gives them joy, peace, relax and poise to the mind. The new women though undergoes suffering, they attach a new meaning to their meaningless life. They also fight to have their own identity, voice and place not only in family but also in the patriarchal society. For this they take bold decision and are ready to meet any outcome of whatever it may be, as they are aware of their potential.

To wind up, *Snapshot* clearly reveals out the power game of women in the marital life. This novel deeply examines and reveals the various aspects of women's life in family, her conjugal life, her marital disharmony, her relationship with her husband etc and consequently brings out the aspect of marriage that crumbles man-woman relationship. The novelist expedites the experience of six women characters Swathi, Aparna, Reema, Noor, Surekha and Rashmi who are more powerful and dominative than their male parts. These women consider sex as a sign of their new found ideas of women's liberation and hence they freely indulge in extra sexual relationship, with various men. These women think that individual needs and emotions are most important and so they discard man's power totally by rejecting the traditional norms of women that is assigned by the patriarchal society. Infact these women have transformed the entire pattern of marital life in a new way, by taking power in their hands.

De though pictures out the promiscuity in relationship more, she does not depict that is away from the society. She brings out the reality that is happening in our country where the characters have got an idea through the influence of western culture. Men should understand of women's emotional needs and have to equally adjust with women without an eye of male perceptive. When a husband or man denying to respect and fails to give their need, it is the time they break out the shell and act as they wish to attain a place and thereby to show their power. Thus through *Snapshot* De emphasizes the power of women who attains their individual identity in the marital life and also insists men not to undermine women in society.

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