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FEMALE RESISTANCE AGAINST REPRESSION IN SHOBHA DE'S
"STRANGE OBSESSION"

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ABSTRACT

The paper, titled Female Resistance against Repression throws light on the significance of the institution of marriage and familial love as portrayed in Shobha De's sensational novel *Strange Obsession*. It also underscores that women, must be discrete to distinguish between the real and deceptive, fake and genuine, deleterious and healthy. She also exhorts the need for women to master their own self in the process of attaining independence. The emphasis is laid on curbing the unconventional feminine desires which subjugates women. As a socially conscious writer, De attempts to bring these erring women back into the orbit of socially sanctified morality.

Keywords : Lesbianism, psychopaths , harmonious existence , familial bonding, institution of marriage, freedom .

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INTRODUCTION

Shobha De, a renowned and a prolific living writer projects her social vision through affirmation of the feminine self. She predominantly deals with the lives of the upper class society and examines the institution of family and marriage. She opines in *Shooting from the Hip*: "The whole question of the position of females in India is so wonderfully confused that it's impossible to take any one stand on it"(108). Her commitment towards improving the condition of women deserves appraisal.

De's fiction emerges from within the universe of her mind which has been shaped by the rebellious attitude in her childhood, expanded by her formal education in psychology and forced by her own experiences (as a woman). Her books are amazingly intricate, erotic and totally enthralling. She uses her novels as a weapon to break the taboos of sex and gender system, which are part of cultural and social milieu in India.

Both, in the Western and Indian scenario, bisexual sets the normal and sane, and lesbianism reflects abnormal and diseased. De's third novel *Strange Obsession* (1992) deals with the sensational subject of lesbianism. The novel revolves around the lustful lesbian relationship of two young girls, Amrita Aggarawal and Meenakshi Iyengar (Minx or Meenu). The novel relates the story of Meenakshi Iyengar's (Minx's) abnormal, weird and unnatural passion for Amrita, a Bombay based model who in order to embark a career in the

glittering celebrity world, moves from Delhi to Bombay only to be trapped by the manipulating and scheming Minx. Though Amrita is helped by Minx in attaining her ambition of becoming 'India's highest paid model' in a remarkably short period of time in the world of fashion and modeling, she is eventually enforced by the latter into a lesbian relationship.

Although she is warned about the danger of continuing her friendship with Minx by many of her friends, she finds herself unable to loosen the grips of Minx. She desperately tries to get as far as she could from Minx but Minx tries all possible ways to develop a closer relationship with her by using implied threats in order to tighten her web around her. While Minx enjoys the sexual encounters, Amrita feels guilty and entrapped. Minx, who understands that the disclosure of her lesbian orientation has created a dramatic repercussion in Amrita, tries to win the sympathy of Amrita by narrating a fictitious story about her own abuse as a child from her father. Minx not only wins the sympathy of Amrita but also wins the favor of Amrita's parents by promising to take good care of their daughter.

Their relationship represents a kind of typology in the modern urban set-up where woman is the enemy of woman. Minx, a sociopath in an aggressive, tyrannical and manipulative manner attempts to control and dominate Amrita. She confers: "I'm not one to give up so easily. Whether or not you like it, you'll have to accept my presence in your life." (33) It is clear through her words that "Minx knows what she is. She, consciously or subconsciously, identifies herself in negation. She is extremely passionate for Amrita and sometimes becomes violent" (Gajendra Kumar 84). Minx, to achieve her goal, becomes sly, clever and strong-headed.

Although Minx seems to be against the act of being submissive to men, she fails to realise her own deviance from the norm, instead she justifies her lustful feelings for Amrita in the name of love. Although Amrita replies with contempt: "I hate you. I'm not going to spend the rest of my life being controlled by a pervert...I'd rather die than live with you" (117), Amrita's ceaseless efforts in freeing herself from the prolonged miseries express the possibilities of feminine resistance against repression.

Driven by unacceptable lustful longing, Minx, who is at the verge of insanity and abnormality, becomes a destructive force. De, through the accidents of Lola and Partha, reveals the psyche of lesbians in general. With no choice left, Amrita, returns to Mumbai in the company of Minx. Her deviant sexual nature and performance frightens Amrita and she confesses: "I feel suffocated... I feel like a prisoner, I can't breathe. I need my independence." (177) When Karan, Amrita's friend wants to free her, proposes to marry her, she rejects the offer under the pretext that it can be risky for him as he too is under the strict observation of Minx.

Amrita rejects Rakesh Bhatia too, as she is obsessed with the idea that she is being watched by Minx, rejects her mother's proposal of her marriage. Although she is not personally interested in marrying him, she considers it as an opportunity, an instrument for her escape and freedom from the bondage of Minx's oppression, tyranny and injustice. When Minx gets to know of Amrita's marriage proposal, she flies into a rage. When Amrita gets married to Rakesh she kidnaps Rakesh and in a combat she is mortally injured. The novel ends with the statement: "Amrita was free at last." (302).

Minx's abnormal behavior can be attributed to the lack of parental guidance during her childhood. She grows up as a neglected and spoiled child because of her mother's psychological maladies. As a child victim she believes that living within a web of her own and maintaining secrecy of truth is normal. It is from her childhood that she starts telling lies and deceives truth by avoiding harsh realities of her life. Thus, she lives in her own world of fantasy. Through Minx, De opines that the role of parents is significant in the formation of children to help them emerge confident. De also posits the importance of family bonding in one's life and reiterates that bad parenting contributes to distorted behavior.

Thus, Shobha De, through Amrita and Minx cherishes the institution of marriage and condemns the unconventional paths taken by women in their search for identity. She demands men's equal participation and cooperation to the cause of women's liberation. As Morgan opines "... it is true that marriage, the home and the family form the major areas of a woman's life", De stresses the importance of marriage as it brings fulfillment in the life of a woman (148). Amrita and Minx throw light on the significance of the institution of

marriage and familial love which enhance the inner strength and assist in the establishment and assertion of identity in women. It also underscores that women lead a completely free and unobsessed life, and be discrete so as to distinguish between the real and the deceptive, fake and genuine, deleterious and healthy.

Rakesh who is free of the patriarchal attitude represents the possibility of a harmonious marriage which assists women in attaining liberation. Towards the end of the novel, Rakesh assures Amrita of her safety: "the nightmare is over,you are here you are here-- with me... forever, safe and secure."(251) evokes feelings of solace in her that he will make a wonderful husband. These words of consolation marked by genuine love and concern for Amrita, evokes feelings of gratitude. Amrita, with a turbulent manifestation of the past, accepts marriage and wifehood as a sanctified function and evolves a duty- bound wife. Thus, hope in her marriage revives her identity as subjective entity, unlike that of the vegetative existence in her past. At the end, as a survivor of sex abuse, Amrita recovers and heals from the damages caused by mental agony and guilt through marriage, love and support. Through marriage she enjoys psychological fulfillment and security that she is transformed into a self- obliterated and dedicated wife overcoming the guilt of having clandestine relations with Minx in the past.

Conclusion

To quote the words of R. K. Dhawan: "One of the major reasons for Shobha De's popularity as a writer is her intimate understanding of women and their problems" (11). For De the key-concept to man-woman relationship is synthesis not schism, unity not discord, love not antagonism. Marriage is not a form of bondage and servitude but one of the firm solutions to women's problems. Marriage neither throttles independence nor symbolises personal regression. Thus, the institution of marriage prevails as the strongest force- the absolute attractive and the most blessed of human ties and duties, where man and woman emerge as harbingers of peace.

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