



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.3.,2016 (July-Sept. )

ISSN INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

REVELATION OF PSYCHIC WHOLENESS IN SHOBHA DE'S "SULTRY DAYS"

Dr.DIVYA.C.

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Nirmala College For Women,  
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India



ABSTRACT

The paper, titled 'Revelation of Psychic Wholeness in Shobha De's *Sultry Days*' discusses the powerful site of rebellion and self-assertion in Shobha De's *Sultry Days*(1994). The protagonist Nisha is transformed from the ingénue of submissive woman into a thriving complex character by asserting and establishing psychic wholeness. The novel apart from throwing light on the world of advertising, journalism, glamour encased in the hollowness, artificiality and inner fragmentation of the upper class society, also focuses on Nisha's voyage towards self-realization. The novel also attempts to propagate that female subjectivity can resist male injustice and is capable of sustenance by facing it confidently eventually evolving triumphant.

**Key words** : Female objectification, self exploration, faith, Self assertion, subversion, materialism.

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INTRODUCTION

Shobha De, unlike the diasporic and colonial writers who devote themselves to transcultural dilemmas and problems of transmigration, projecting the socio-political and cultural reality, attempts to explore the inner realities of the urban female psyche. Amar Nath Prasad in "Shobha De's Small Betrayals: An Exploration of Realism and Romance" opines: "The forte of Shobha De is the interpretation and elucidation of the interior world diving deep into the fathomless depths of the mind and digging out the pearls and gems hidden under the surface" (143). Despite experiencing the disgusting absurdity and void of existence, the self in De's novels discovers its value through self-exploration.

*Sultry Days* begins with Nisha's encounter with Deb in the college canteen where Deb, who likes to be called as God, is introduced to Nisha. Unlike the ordinary girls, Nisha is attracted towards his repulsive manners and appearance "A sort of infatuation towards him that simultaneously attracted and repelled" (2). The two protagonists Deb and Nisha belonged to two different strata of society. Deb (God) belongs to the lower middle class whereas Nisha belongs to the upper class. Nisha's acquaintance with Deb exposes her to the stark realities of life.

The absence of love in her familial environment creates a vacuum and her psyche is subjected to a world of illusions which provokes her to seek it outside her family. To entertain his tastes, Nisha spends time and money buying gifts for Deb, for she confesses that meeting out every extravagance of Deb gratifies her: "I loved buying things for God. It gave me a sense of belonging" (22). Her words emphasize that she, like any woman, longs for love, concern and acceptance to that of material comforts.

Deb's love for the world of art and journalism and Nisha's preference to advertising keep them bound even after their education. After graduation, Nisha opts for a job in a mediocre advertising agency which not only gives her a professional identity but also confers her much opportunity to meet varied types of public figures like businessmen, models, politicians, sycophants and fixers. As she moves closer to them, she understands the harsh realities of the mediocre world, their hypocrisy and lack of depth, where they exist as shadowy figures without any sustenance and individuality. One is reminded of the filthy lure of the present world where people are celebrity-driven and succumb to glamour and publicity.

She confesses her position in cathartic revelation: "We (her family) lived our lives in near-isolation, the conversation rarely going beyond mundane pleasantries." (346) expresses the detachment among the family members. In the absence of emotional bonding, her subconscious self struggles to exist; the emotional aridity camouflages her identity as an exile provoking her to break herself from family.

Premarital sex is considered as a social anathema as it threatens society by violating the principles of female virginity and social codes. R. S. Pathak opines: "Women's difference underlies and the most of their problems arise from her sexuality that has been repressed by patriarchal culture". (146) The fact that Nisha never experiences the turbulence and sense of guilt in her moral violation, is an outcome of her longing for a sense of belongingness and relief. De never justifies her protagonist's violation of moral codes, but focusses on women's emotional necessity to be loved and cared. It is a mere offshoot of her alienation- a relief, a sense of belongingness for she likes herself to be called as God's girl.

Deb's driving ambition to make money leads him to cut corners which eventually elevate his position and demand in the upper strata of the society. His inordinate greed for riches culminates into compromised journalism by associating himself with Yashwantbhai. Through socio-economic changes, Deb manages to step out of his identity as a communist. Nisha realizes that material prosperity has brought spiritual death in him. Anita Myles truthfully comments in "Subjectivity, Class and Feminism in Shobha De's Sultry Days,": "Shobha De believes in drawing a real life picture of coetaneous society. Her description of members of one class merging into the other with great success is a truthful portrayal of metropolitan social life..." (57).

At one point, God stops pestering Nisha for finances and along with it stops his visits but she sincerely waits for him. Although she is aware of the fact that Deb is a typical drifter and is in the least concerned about her, she finds it difficult to stay aloof from him. She genuinely warns him against the foul play of sycophants and their hypocrisies. Nisha's foresightedness goes to the extent of warning Deb: "...be careful. That same pen can become a jack-knife." (169)

After breaking up with Deb, Nisha's quest is positively affiliated towards others and goes beyond her introvert self. She explores the possibility of a new identity not by denying the self but by affirming human values. She is motivated to publish an article on Yashwantbhai which brings his shadiness to light. This aggravates him and he sends hired men to threaten her. This alarms Deb and he is worried over her safety and advises her to stay at bay. Nisha's determination and courage is evident when she queries him whether he is trying to threaten her. He replies: "Today, you happen to be his target. I'm here to warn you as a friend- be careful". (345) With this, their relationship takes a new dimension and Nisha asserts "I felt at ease with God perhaps for the first time in our relationship" (253). Her love towards Deb rejuvenates. She, thus, succeeds in winning his love.

When Deb is shot, Nisha who adored Deb as God realises that Deb is a mortal being and not a supernatural one. She comments: "This man wasn't God. He was frail, fragile and helpless, like the rest of us" (361). These lines signify that she no longer worships but realises that Deb too is an ordinary human being. Nisha bears her estrangement and isolation with stoic restraint but Deb becomes neurotically impatient and

vents his isolation as a defense mechanism. Nisha is heartbroken when she sees the terrible plight of Deb. Herself undergoes all mortifications and abasements in order to help the famished and destitute Deb, yet her spirit remains untarnished.

Deb sacrifices his own life to ensure Nisha's survival. However, she is terribly sorry and dejected and stays by his side, boosting his morale. Her entrenched love is further expressed when she says: "I was longing to hold this impossible man in my arms and whisper to him, 'Dear God...be mine'." (370). Deb's health deteriorated further. During his last moments, no one was there near his deathbed. And she muses: "God had gone off ... without saying goodbye to anyone. Died like a dog. Or like a god..." (374)

At the end, Deb with all his liberated thoughts and actions succumbs to death, while Nisha with her greater inner strength encourages him and makes his death peaceful. Thus, the quest for material fulfillment becomes a fleeting illusion for Deb as his attempt was not more than a rat race towards vain glory. Nisha succeeds in instilling values in Deb. It is evident that there is a positive formulation of self only through the discovery of real potentials. Hence, it stands tall that the real sense of glory in life is possible only through self discovery.

Deb finds no resolution or redemption in his life, he dies a death of a dog. Nisha is not able to trace anyone near his death bed. "There was nobody around". (361) Nisha, though left with her lost love for Deb, is likely to pick up the threads of life and begin a new life. De underscores that Nisha is not an abstract entity, but is a bundle of flesh and blood who with her sublime grace wins the battle of her life. The traditional ethics of female renunciation and self sacrifice is restored in a different perspective as Nisha stoically moves forward.

Thus, after the death of Deb, Nisha transforms and redeems herself from gross mundane values and inherits life's intrinsic nobility and goodness, its strength and endurance. Misery fails to bog her down, and she persists to stultify her endeavouring and sanguine self thereby strengthening the concept of womanhood which is to add grace to humanity.

Through Nisha, De brings to light how the nobility of an individual in spite of all sufferings impart an epic dimension to the self. Nisha wrestles with the worn out societal values and endeavours to transcend its mundane limitations through self sacrifice and self- realization. Her unflinching faith in human values till the end, even in the midst of materialism and privations, along with the moral support from her mother is highly commendable.

Thus, Nisha is a consciously struggling for socio-psychic emancipation. It is to say that De documents the demented wanderings of a split self in quest for wholeness. It is remarkable to observe that her novels explicitly emphasize on the powerful self in putting up a heroic fight in a hostile milieu. To her, the 'self' is more powerful.

De's works significantly attempt to redress the age- old beliefs and concepts and substitute a new order instead of the old, which would no longer permit degradation of women but would elevate them as an autonomous being. Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes "The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femininity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways;..." (30) Hence, *Sultry Days* is an existential struggle of a sensitive soul against the oppressive dual standards and condescending attitude adopted by the male chauvinistic society, which frames its rules indenting to make woman constantly feel subordinate to men.

De's works project women as round characters, both strong and at the same time vulnerable, which permits them to emerge as 'New Women'- independent, self- willed and totally autonomous, financially, mentally and physically. Instead of seeking sympathy or crying over her helplessness and misery, Nisha tries to create space within the prevailing system, even ready to experiment with the different possibilities of an independent existence. Her concept of freedom is not social or economical but freedom of mind through will and action. Apart from portraying the condition of women, the main objective of De is noble and genuine as she focuses on directing humanity to the path of refinement by insisting on the significance of human values in one's life.

"I write with a great deal of empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flags. I feel very strongly about the woman's situations" (*The Hindustan Times Magazine* 3) validates De's social vision. She never espouses tradition by making her women role-models or ideals. Her women refuse to be acquiescent, but are conscious of their emotional needs pining for a change of order enabling them attain self-fulfillment. They also question the validity of the accepted set of values, and rebel against the existing moral codes and social norms which deny women the freedom necessary towards the nourishment of the individual self. In their attempt to be true to their self, they are often morally deprived. Hence, their concept of freedom is not confined to the realm of social and economic freedom but to the mental makeup and emotional attitude.

Thus, De's characters are validated not by the chastity of their body but by the purity of their heart. Through Nisha, De highlights that a woman should be self-willed, self-reliant, rational and aware of her own self, having faith in the inner strength because a meaningful change can be brought only from within, by being free in the deeper psychic sense revealing psychic wholeness.

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