

Shobha De's Snapshots: A Study of Urban Indian Women

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ABSTRACT:

This paper attempts to study Shobha De's Snapshots through its focus on the lives of six Urban Indian Women from the aristocratic families. They represent a new woman. This woman practices every kind of freedom including extra marital affairs for satisfaction and financial independence. She wants wealth, reputation, physical pleasure, and domination over her counterpart. She wants to enjoy her life irrespective of social norms. She wants her space and satisfaction from her counterpart. She thinks that her counterpart is insensitive towards her and therefore, she prepares herself for breaking the marriage and living her life at her will. De presents this new woman as bold, rebellious, freedom-lover, lusty and unconventional.

KEYWORDS:

Domination, elite woman, hypocrisy, frustration, marriage

Shobha De's Snapshots presents the lives of six Indian elite woman. The novel deals with the life of six women from the high-class society. They live their pretentious life. Basically, the author is concerned with the life of high-class society women in most of her novels. The present novel is no exception for this. In this novel, Shobha De depicts the real life of the six elite women wearing masks all the time in their real life. All these women- Aparna, Reema, Rashmi, Noor, Surekha and Swati - live the pretentious life. Almost always they try to hide the reality. They do not disclose their secrets. Each and every woman, of these six, has her own secrets. They live their disturbed lives. But no one gives an outlet to her repressed feelings. As they meet in the reunion party, suggested by Swati and organized by Reema, they begin to reveal their own secrets and at the same time each other's secrets as well.

Aparna is a business woman. She recollects her memories with Rohit when she returns after spending the week end in Goa with Prem. Prem is Aparna's employee. She lives lonely as she is separated from her husband Rohit. Aparna and Rohit have left each other. Aparna prefers to forget Rohit for his unfaithfulness and his relations with

Swati. But when Rohit treats her like a slave and his housewife, Aparna gets irritated. There is no marital bond between the two. Many of the times she "hated the fact that she is a woman." (Snapshots, 31) She expects him to share and care. But he is like any other husbands, who never care and share. "The same double standards. The same hypocrisies." (Snapshots-31) As Aparna is frustrated in her married life, she spends her weekend in Goa with Prem only for lust and not for love. Aparna lives the hypocrite life. She is burning thoroughly. Therefore, there is only frustration and no satisfaction. Their relation gives more pains than pleasure. Such relationship besides their frequent quarrel with each other results in separation. She also remembers a competition called "the best-looking girl". Aparna and Swati enter the final round and Aparna emerges as the winner. As a kind of revenge, Swati allures Aparna's husband, Rohit. Most of Aparna's friends attend 'No Kids, No Sex' club. These women are not interested in any man as a human. They are interested in a partner. It doesn't matter who the person is. Like the members of this club Aparna also runs after money, reputation and lust. Therefore, 'husband' becomes an 'awful word' for Aparna. However, she recalls her mother's words and becomes restless:

"Remember, a woman in our society is nothing without her husband. Study as much as you wish. Win prizes. Get a good job. But don't let all these things affect you, give you a big head. You may be the prime minister of India tomorrow, but when you come home, you automatically become your husband's wife. If you forget that you are finished.

Your marriage is finished." (Snapshots, 34)

Surekha is a housewife, married to Harsh. Theirs is an arranged marriage. She lives with her husband and mother-in-law. She lives under their pressure. She is the busiest woman in her personal life. She does not have enough time for herself in her busy schedule with dhobi, fruit vendor, part-time servants and her housework. She does not live a life of satisfaction. She observes herself in the mirror and decides to be different from what she is. She is not happy with her husband as well. She is living her life under the pressure of her mother-in-law and husband. When she receives Reema's letter inviting

her for the reunion party, she thinks and thinks on a reason for going out of her house. In order to escape from her boring life, she maintains her relations with Dolly. Since Dolly is left by Swati, she lives with Surekha. Noor blames to Surekha for Dolly's unmarried status when Noor once observes Surekha and Dolly making love to each other. Even Dolly's parents think in the same way.

Rashmi lives with her son Pips. The relations between the mother and the son aren't so well. He always complains of her untidiness. Rashmi is not married. A film director called Parminder, a rich man takes fancy in her and lives with her in an agreement. Tired of Rashmi's untidiness, Parminder leaves her, when he comes to know that she is pregnant with Pips. Parminder is very nice as a husband. But she never feels him to be hers. During their first encounter in bed, they agree to live together till they remain happy. She does do everything to keep him happy, except her untidiness at home. She is not good at "home-making". This compels Parminder to leave Rashmi forever. In order to earn her livelihood, she maintains relationship with so many people. But no one tolerates her for long time. Each and every woman plays different tricks to keep their men happy. Some use their body, some use food, some provide special services and keep their men interested and enslaved. But Rashmi plays no such tricks and when she learns about it, it is too late to apply them in her day-to-day life. Rashmi hates the word 'responsibilities' which reminds her of her mother's abusing for untidy books and wares. Now her eleven-year-old son reminds and complaints her of the same things. She is annoyed of the frequent and repeated complaints. She is tempted to say.

"Because I am not like other mummies. And you are not like other kids. You, my dear chap, are a bastard. Yes, a real-life bastard. Of course, you do have a father. All bastards do. But he is not my husband. He is someone else's husband. And father. Now, do you understand why your mummy can't be like other mummies?" (Snapshots-47)

Tired of the life she is living, she reveals such secrets. Besides Parminder, Rashmi had so many men in her life like Max, Younes and others. Max is very nice to both Rashmi and her son. When Max leaves her, Younes comes in her life. With Younes's departure she concludes that "all men leave". When Jr. Pips asks Rashmi about her separation from all these men, he promises not to leave her. But at a point in his life, he also leaves Rashmi leaving a note, "Hotels don't get pregnant. And they provide clean sheets." She loses this note, but these words get imprinted on her mind. She

thinks for a long time about her past and at last consoles herself saying,

"And you'd give anything for a man of your own. Anything at all. So quit the big act and START LOOKING. He's out there somewhere, grab him before some other bitch does. There is a trick to it. A method. Learn it. Perfect it. And this time, make sure you chain him down. Seal the exits. Block all escape routes. Hang on to the man. Last chance coming up, baby. Take it, take it, take it."

(Snapshots, 70)

Noor is a kind hearted girl. She is very kind towards people, animals and even inanimate objects. She is a neglected child of her parents- Nawab and Begum. Noor seeks in an accident while going on a picnic with her lover, Amir. In this accident, she loses her beauty, memory and thinking ability. After this accident, her brother, Nawaz takes fancy in his sister for incestuous relations. She is repelled by and sometimes fascinated towards Nawaz at the same time. At the age of her twelve, when Swati visits Noor's house, Nawaz compels Swati to sleep with him. To his surprise she enjoys it. From this time, Nawaz turns to his sister. He gives her no options and she is neglected by her parents. Therefore, in order to adjust with the circumstances, she favors Nawaz.

After many years, Noor realizes that her relationship with Nawaz is unusual. Their relation would not have stopped, hadn't Swati stayed one night at Noor's house enjoying first brandy and then sex with Nawaz.

Reema lives with her husband, Ravi and daughter, Shonali. Ravi is interested in making money. She knows very well that she may not be able to marry such a rich person though she does not like her husband. She finds herself lonely at home. Reema gets disappointed and frustrated during her first night with Ravi. She explains that when she emerges half-naked, Ravi looks at her simply and continues to read evening newspapers for ten minutes. To her disappointment, Ravi goes to bed, doing nothing and keeping her awake for a long time. Therefore, she takes fancy in her brother-in-law, Randhir, who lives in the USA. Noor reminds her of her relations with Raju. And it is then Reema explains how she was attracted towards Raju and her subsequent pregnancy from Raju. She remembers the days of her illegal pregnancy. In order to escape from the situation, all of them seek help of Swati's aunt in Aparna's house. It is only physical attraction that compels Reema to maintain the relation with Raju. But when Raju is found dead, she gets married to Ravi, a son of a prosperous businessman. She never loves Ravi. It is only lust to

attract her towards Ravi. But Noor discloses Reema's secret that it is not Raju to avoid Reema. Rather, it is Reema who avoided Raju as he is not an educated, employed and rich person. She also discloses Reema's affair with her brother-in-law, Randhir Nath, a curly-haired man. On the same day of her marriage with Ravi, Randhir enters her life. And now, she is physically and emotionally attracted towards Randhir as well.

When Reema tells to Swati that she does not have choice, Swati corrects her, "No, Sweetheart, my circumstances weren't all that different from yours. I made my choices. And was willing to pay the price-that's what separates the women from the girls." (Snapshots, 152) These women are ready to do everything to fulfil their lust. As Swati states, "Don't laugh girls. I can understand what Reema means perfectly. Sex is a hobby. For some it can be an all-consuming one. For others, a passing fancy." (Snapshots, 161)

On the day of their reunion party, Reema hires the most famous caterers, 'Tanya and Titu'. She brings a box of Champaign from the store. She wears finalized jewelry and tries at her level best to look younger than she is and looks. She is expert in make-up. She can apply each and everything to hide her age and attract people. She prefers salwar-kameez to sari. In the party, Reema narrates the situation of women of their community. She also states that they advise a woman seeking pleasure outside marriage with their motto, "Say no to divorce. Never break the home. Have your fun quietly somewhere. But don't leave the family. That is the sensible way of handling situation." (Snapshots, 295)

Swati's proclamation makes it clear the kind of lives these six women lived and are living. She declares that

"I'm breaking all the rules today. Summon a slave. It's champagne time. Come on gals, drink up, drink up. This is an occasion. The best. I haven't felt this exhilarated since I lost my virginity- and all of you know how, when, where and with whom that happened. Let's drink to us. Let's drink to school. Let's drink to memories. Let's drink to innocence. Let's drink to fun. Fuck it! Let's just drink. I mean DRINK." (Snapshots, 117)

Swati asks for "every single dirty detail". Swati clutches the situation and calls on the girls:

"Hey, come on gals, nobody's watching. Nobody will know. There aren't husbands to spoil our fun.

Or fathers, brothers, boyfriends. No men for a change. What a bloody relief. Let's have a party. Remember how it used to be in school? Everybody joined in, you can't refuse. Leave it to me. I'm the

expert. I'll fix something that won't leave a trace – no color, no smell, no after-effects. Just a great high. Trust me. Mama Swati knows it all."

(Snapshots, 127)

Swati is a smart woman from her childhood itself. She is a product of a mixed parentage. Her father is from Kerala and her mother is half Assamese and half Bengali. This mixed parentage contributed to her beauty. She joins a drama school in England. Now, she is an actress and lives in London. In order to avenge her friends, she plays many tricks. She catches hold of the husbands and lovers of so many of her friends. In order to take her revenge on Aparna, Swati sleeps with Rohit, Aparna's husband. She takes revenge on Aparna as Aparna wins the beauty competition. This contributes to break the marital relations between Aparna and Rohit. When Swati goes to Noor's house, she sleeps with Nawaz and enjoys everything there. It is here Noor cuts off her friendship with Swati.

Swati requests Reema to arrange the 'reunion party' just in order to get an idea from the real faces and voices. She wants to present the exciting world of Indian Urban Women of the Nineties, calling it 'Sisters of the Subcontinent'. Therefore, she comes to Bombay to reveal their past secrets to one another in presence of every one of them. She asks, "Tell me which one of you here is all pure." (Snapshots, 290) This makes it clear that what kind of lives these women lived. They live only pretentious lives.

CONCLUSION:

Shobha De is one of the well-known Indian women writers to break and go against the tradition through her novels. She challenges the traditional values. She is a very bold writer. She introduces her women characters as bold, confident and revolutionary breaking all the traditional values. They are mostly independent sometimes living with their husband, brothers and father. Still, they continue to maintain their independent status. "Morality" and "Virginity" are filthy words for them. They throw these words out of window and enjoy their lives freely. She presents the real world of the Indian urban women through this novel. The aristocratic women break the traditions and social norms. They are rebellious.

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