

Shobaa De—A Short Biography

SANTOSH KUMAR SINGH

Shobhaa De is an eminent Indian writer (novelist) who is often known as India's Jackie Collins. She was born as Shobhaa Rajadhyaksha to the Saraswat Brahmin family of Maharashtra on January 7, 1974. She completed her graduation from St. Xavier's college, Mumbai and obtained a degree in Psychology. She started her career as a model and made a name for herself. Thereafter, in 1970 she switched to journalism, a field where she remains even today. She brought out three magazines namely Stardust, Society and Celebrity. She has also worked as consulting editor to Sunday and Megacity. Because of her passion for journalism and specially as a columnist (often writing in The Times of India) she always renders her views on every development in India or abroad.

Shobhaa De has always been a personality to be reckoned. For nearly three decades, she has been revolutionizing the written world. By Her versatile personality and curt writing, she has exposed so many vanities, targeted the indisciplined teenagers and their ravishing life style particularly the rapid degeneration of human values in Mumbai society. (Symbolically the entire globe) It has been seen that she has a missionary zeal when she brings the rampant immorality and indecency of today's so called civilized society to the forth. In her writings she is highly peeved at the degeneration of these values and she aims to define what society is and how it comes into being.

Shobha De is very audacious in her treatment of the contemporary society. She catapults everyone. The virtuous are always appreciated while the corrupt people are lampooned. However, her criticism and appraisal are not vindictive. In her defense, it is said that she does it with an intention to enlighten her readers. In her later works, there has been a basic decency and moral talk. She is of a very progressive and innovative mindset and this is the reason why she has given up the mode of age old conventional writing. By virtue of her twelve novels and prolific journalism, she has devised a new genre of 'celebrity journalism'.

Her revolutionary writings have generated a herd of critics as well as fans. Throughout the globe, there are many who have held her responsible for over handling sexual matters in her novels. But their denunciations have not deterred her from her way and despite that her works have been warmly received not only in India but also in various European countries. It is evident from the fact that her early novels (*Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights* and *Strange Obsession*) have been chosen by the reputed school of Oriental and African studies of London as course material. Even some of her novels have been introduced in syllabus of U.G. and P.G. in English of Bombay University as course study.

Shobha De has also been seen as moralizing the society. Undoubtedly, she has always cherished moral values and a lot of research has been conducted in this field of her writing. She has great respect for the venerable institution of marriage. In *Starry Nights*, she finds Akshay Arora the promiscuous superstar of Bollywood as her spokesperson, who though having affair with so many women, turns down the proposal of Aasha Rani who convinces him to enter into wedlock by embracing Islam which admits polygamy. Even in her latest work *Spouse*, she defends the pious bond of marriage in which she discusses the decay and

demise of the institution of marriage. She goes on to say that it is not marriage that is deficient but our attitude to it. It needs to be cemented. She further goes on to say "I don't know what it is about marriage, it is maddening as an institution. When you analyze it, it's also bewildering and illogical. Often it is scary, it does not make sense, two mere strangers committing to each other for the rest of their lives! And yet, there must be a very good reason why marriage has survived as the only enduring partnership right down from Shiva-Parvati to now"

She enjoys a considerable amount of love and affection from her own fraternity. She is always seen gracing book release functions and seminars with her presence. She has totally devoted herself to writing and prefers to do everything that benefits her audience. She frankly says that all these blessings have been bestowed on her by her audience. She really feels that she owes it to her audiences who have supported her through every storm.

Shobhaa De is essentially a feminist writer like Nayantara Sehgal and Shashi Deshpande. She concentrates on women's problems and gives a new approach to them. She is a modern novelist who recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women and attempts to turn this pattern upside down through her writings. Nearly all heroines of her novels have been sympathised by her whether it is Aasha Rani or Maya. She constantly tries to break patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against male dominance. In an Interview with Malvika Sanghvi on her career, family and her marketing the Shobhaa De persona she said "This is my vocation, this is my livelihood. If I don't commit to it then what am I committing to?" We live in a market-driven age," she continues, "I disagree that I am marketing the Shobhaa De personality, every author in the universe, has his or her picture on the book jacket, so what do I do. ...not run my pictures on the book jacket?" Stressing on her

family life and its importance she said, “I am basically a housewife and a mother to six children. I have no illusions. Tomorrow, if I’m dead and gone, who is going to mourn me? My immediate family, no one else really, so does anything else matter? Life is going to keep spinning.... I have never measured success in terms of worlds to conquer. To me, success is a very simple formula: have you done your best and are you reasonably satisfied with the way you’ve led your life? If you can look yourself in the eye in the mirror first thing in the morning, if you can be truly naked with yourself and the person you share your life with, without fear of being judged, and still feel loved or cherished or valued, I would say that is success.

Shobhaa is the consummate media person, and even though it’s a delight to debate with her, it’s not easy to get her to let her hair down. But one thing’s for sure—you can depend upon her for delectable scoops, and no delay in discussing delicate matters (in ‘debating tonight’ program of Arnab Goswami on Times Now News channel). Indeed she does not deliberate before she delivers a denouement. Married to the debonair businessman Dilip De, who demonstrates his love for her in matters great and small, and who, it is rumored, is a keen interpreter of Vedic texts, theirs seems to be a democratic partnership, a delicate balance of companionship and domestic bliss.

At present, she lives in Mumbai with her family working as a columnist and writer for a fortnight magazine, *The Week*. In this periodical, she writes on various issues concerning the society. She speaks her mind in her writings and columns. She often expresses her dissatisfaction with respect to the behavior exhibited by the present day generation. According to New York Times ‘Ms. Shobhaa De shocks India and much of its literary set like no other writer today.’”

Shobhaa De has authored twelve books. In 1980, she wrote novel-the bestselling *Socialite Evenings* and in 1990 she

published *Starry Nights*. Her other works are *Strange Obsession*, *Snapshots*, *Second Thoughts Sisters*, *Sultry Days*, *Shooting From Jeep*, *Surviving Men*, *Selective Memory: stories from My life* and *Uncertain Liaisons* was written in collaboration with Khushwant Singh.

WORKS CITED

Pathak, R.S. and Dodiya (2000) *Feminist Concerns in Shobhaa De's Works*, Delhi: Goels.

De, Shobhaa (1989) *Starry Nights*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, Ltd.

The Times of India: April 10, 2005 (From an Interview).