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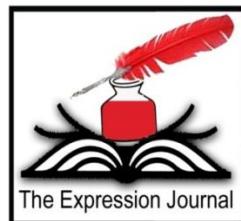
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HOW DREAMS ARE SHATTERED: DARK PICTURES OF FILM INDUSTRY AS REVEALED IN SHOBHA DE'S NOVEL *STRANGE OBSESSION*

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Abstract

Many feminists blame on men that the women are kept under pressure and they also deserve equal status but there are some women who declare their liberty even more than men do, and these women tend to live their life on their own sets of rules. It is generally seen that the girls who live in remote areas, their eyes dazzle to see the glamour of the film industry and they move to big cities like Bombay to make their career but there may be lakhs of aspirants whose dreams are shattered. These girls take a step to make their career in Mumbai but they are cheated by some fraudsters who misuse them and ruin their career. The selfishness of the people of the metro-cities has been revealed by Shobha De in her novel *Strange Obsession*. The wickedness of the world has been depicted thorough the character of Minx (Meenakshi Iyengar) who is the spoilt child of an Inspector General of Police. She is a psycho and lesbian. She had bad childhood due to her father's transfers and her mother's involvement in the social works. Minx also had been the victim of rape by her father when she was thirteen-year-old. She was driven out from two schools and her parents also become cold towards her. She remains an unattained and uncared child in her family and she wants to vomit out her frustration on the society. Amrita Aggarwal, an innocent girl comes into her oily words because she aspires to become a supermodel by all means. She is a young beauty and her beauty whips up jealousy in Mumbai. Minx drags Amrita into lesbianism and they have a strange obsession for each other. Thus, many dirty facets of film industry have been revealed by the researcher through this paper. Further, the novel underscores that a girl should have discrete to distinguish between the fair and foul, real and deceptive, deleterious and beneficial.

Keywords

Shobha De, Modelling, Neurosis, Paranoia, Psychopaths, Absurdity,
Institution of Marriage, Lesbianism, Feminism.

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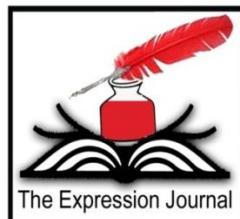
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Shoba De, also called the "Jackie Collins' of India, is a celebrated and venerated novelist whose novels deal with various aspects of women. Shobha De was born on January 7, 1947 in a Brahmin family in Maharashtra. She got her graduation degree from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. Her novels are based on the love, lust, incest, aspiration, family relationships, lesbianism, and pleasure. Her novels deal with the mental agonies of her female characters as Narinder Kumar Neb also writes, "Shobha De's novels largely explore the physical and mental agonies of female characters" (Neb 166).

The novel opens with the pictorial imagery of the aspiration of a young, beautiful and ambitious girl Amrita Aggrawal and her beauty can be judged by the words of her brothers when she is born, "She is so pretty. So perfect. She is going to be the most beautiful woman in the world (De 2). Her father says that his daughter is special. After becoming young, Amrita wants to go to Mumbai to fulfill her dreams to become a model and a neighbour Mrs. Setia tells Amrita's mother, "Mrs. Aggrawal, you are spoiling your daughter. What nonsense this is! How can you allow such a young girl to go to Mumbai all by herself?" (De 1). Amrita's mother also takes her daughter's favour saying that she is not a child now as she is twenty-year-old and is able to face all the hurdles coming on her journey as a model. When Mrs Setia says that there are chances of modeling in Delhi also, Amrita who was overhearing their conversation, says, "Yes, there are... third rate models posing for Ludhiana Wollen Mills, that's not my style" (De 1). Her mother also takes pride for her daughter. Amrita has passion for fashionable clothes. Her father also says about her, "This child is special" (2). She wears a good dress when she leaves for Mumbai and her father warns her about the glamour of Mumbai in these words, "We trust you, beti. Bombay is different from Delhi. You already know that. Take care of yourself" (3).

When Amrita strikes with a taxi in Mumbai, and she falls on the road with her luggage strewn here and there, the cab driver abuses her. Minx comes forward for her help and she introduces herself to the driver that she is the daughter of an Inspector General, V.S. Iyengar.

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Amrita thanks Minx for her help and she tells her that she is new to Mumbai. She takes Amrita to an agency whose owner was her uncle. She notices that Minx was having good relationships with some local dadas. Minx is also impressed by Amrita's beauty and she says, "You are gorgeous...You know that? Of course you are. Everybody must be telling you so" (6).

Life remains normal for few days in Mumbai for Amrita and she struggles to become a superstar. A drastic change comes in her life after her meeting with Minx. Amrita falls in the trap of Minx and she is unable to understand what is happening with her. Minx was a lesbian and when Amrita comes to understand the things, it becomes very late for her. Her life becomes nightmarish when she has lustful relationship with Minx. Gajendra Kumar writes in his article, "*Strange Obsession: A Critical Study*":

Shobha De's explosive novel revolves around the life and lustful relationship of two young women, Amrita and Meenakshi. Fundamentally, it seems to be a psychological documentation of sexual obsession of mysterious woman Meenakshi, also known as minx and her calamitous end. According to him, both of them represent the different kinds of topology of modern urban set up....It is through their behavior and conversation that Shobha De throws significant light on the predicament of these two young women-Minx and Amrita. (Kumar 228)

There are many instances of lesbianism in the novel. Shobha De has used naked images in this novel profusely. This kind of depiction cannot be expected from a female writer, "She was not wearing the bra. She never did. Amrita had seen her taut nipple through the form-fitting, sweat shirt she frequently wore. Guiding her hand, she traced a line over a jagged scar which began under her breasts and went all the way under the armpit" (De 92) but Shobha De did not care for negative comments about this novel.

The trend of lesbianism is gaining momentum since last few decades and the society does not digest it still this kind of lustful relationships can generally seen in the modern society. This kind of liberty is not granted by the parents and only those girls who live away from their parents get involved in such kind of activities. The frank images of sex and nudity have been projected by Shobha De in this novel:

Minx removed her clothes one by one and placed them neatly on the chair close to the bed....She felt her legs open as almost voluntarily as Minx climbed upon her straddling her slim hips with her own, covering her breasts with her hands, cupping the nipples and circling them repeatedly till they ached with a sweet pain. (De 97)

Shobha De wants to reveal the realities of the glitz world and how the dreams of innocent girls are shattered. They have to follow the orders of the successful people to survive in the film industry. Amrita finds that Karan, a photographer, is also feels obsessed towards her and he intends to develop intimacy with her but Amrita does not accept his advances. Even after Amrita's marriage with Rakesh, Karan requests Amrita's husband to allow him to kiss her as he is strangely obsessed with love for Amrita. She does not prefer to talk to him during the long photography sessions but she follows his instructions. Karan suggests Amrita to change her address if she wants to get rid of Minx, but Minx is a cunning girl and nobody is inaccessible to her.

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Amrita takes no time to understand what is in Minx's mind. When she walks into her room past midnight, she finds Minx on her bed. Amrita wants to know what Minx is expecting from her. Minx tells her frankly that she wants Amrita to have physical relations with her but Amrita says that she hates her. She says, "You are a manipulating bitch and I hate you. I really do. But you can't get away with this for long ... wait and see." (117).

Shobha De has written this novel to aware those girls who have to remain in a remote city away from their parents that there may be some girls and women like Minx who may ruin the life of a girl. That's why a girl should think it wisely to trust on somebody. Minx takes undue advantage of Amrita and she feels sadistic pleasure while using Amrita for her personal motives. She is mad in love with Amrita, "And then I met you, I fell in love. A love so intense I felt my body would burst" (93) and has strange obsession for her, "Every fibre of my body vibrates with yours" (105). She wants to have Amrita at any cost and she remains successful in her efforts and then says, "After last night, darling, no explanations are necessary. You belong to me and I belong to you, it's that simple" (96).

Amrita curses herself as she knows it well that she is doing wrong but she feels helpless and is unable to escape from Minx's clutches. Minx says that she will build a temple of love for them. This kind of relationship can be called nothing but madness. Minx finds divine pleasure in this relationship and she starts adoring Amrita considering her a goddess. She kissed Amrita and says, "I worship you... You are my goddess ... My Devi ... I live for you. I shall die for you" (107). L. Sonia Ningthoujam's article, "Traditional Woman Versus Modern Woman: A Study of Shobha De's Novels" says: "The lesbian relationship between Amrita and Minx shows the emerging reality of the new modern woman who finds sexual satisfaction with persons of the same gender" (38).

Amrita knows that she has become helpless but she decides to get away from Minx. She dials Partha's number and requests him to meet her on urgent basis. Partha says that lesbianism is considered a general relationship between two girls and women. "I won't call her a lesbo. The correct term these days for them is, I believe, people who practice alternative sexuality" (113). Amrita is mentally and physically harassed by Minx. She shows cruelty also because she wanted that Amrita is hers and she will not lose her by all means. She is mad after Amrita. She says, "Good bye. No talk? Fine. I'll talk. Amrita was mine and will remain mine. No matter what said she might have shovelled in your direction, that is the truth. She loved me then and you can be bloody sure she loves me now" (191).

Dr R. Bharathi writes, Shobha De' doesn't raise her voice against women's oppression from people, she reveals just how independent women are fighting to obtain their autonomy and goal. She portrays the modern way of life of women who live so that they have unlimited freedom. (1485).

Shobha De has studied woman's psychology very well and that's why her works deal with the problems of women which is why R. K. Dhawan writes, "One of the major reasons for Shobha De's popularity as a writer is her intimate understanding of women and their problems" (11). The critic Mishra writes, "In the galaxy of Indian novelists in English, Indian women writers too shine luminously like their male counterparts by their significant contribution to enrichment of Indian English novels" (20).

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Amrita also gets confused after some time when Karan proposes her for marriage. She turns down his proposal because she knows that Minx has been keeping an eye on her and that's why she rejects the boy whom her mother has chosen for her. When Minx comes to know about Amrita's marriage, she becomes furious and she kidnaps her husband. However the novel ends on a positive note: "Amrita was free at last" (302).

As a conclusion, it can be said that Shobha De's novel *Strange Obsession* delineates the cruel and bitter pictures of the film industry. The girls who dream to become cine-stars must be alert at every step because people look for an opportunity to molest them and ruin their career. Shobha De has successfully painted the stark realities of the glitz world. Dr Naresh K.Vats observes. "De treats the subject of sex elaborately; the sadistic homosexual tendencies of Minx present the height of alternative sexuality. (104).

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