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Moral Degradation and Exploitation of Women in Shobha De's *Starry Nights*: A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

India is a nation where women suffer more than males as a result of the society's contradictory conduct toward women. People are willing to modify women in the name of societal values and morals not just in the villages but also in large metropolitan centers. However, the suffering of women in large urban areas or metropolitan cities differs from that of women in rural areas. Village women suffer more as a result of village residents' continued belief in old harsh social customs whereas urban women suffer from society's degradation of moral values and physical exploitation. Shobha De tries her hardest to portray the moral degradation and exploitation of women in the film business in her novel, *Starry Nights*. The present paper is analysis of women's portrayal specially with reference to urban women in particular.

Key Words: Moral Degradation, Exploitation, Feminism, New Women



Introduction:

Shobha De is a well-known Indian author who writes in the English language. She popularised Hinglish by introducing it as a language in her articles. It wasn't just about being hip when she wrote Hinglish; it was also about recognising that this was how Indians spoke English, not being ashamed about it, and giving it a media platform via her articles. 'Hinglish is undoubtedly Shobha De's finest achievement.

Shobha De depicts upper-class Indian life in her works. She also shows how Indian women are portrayed in modern Indian society. She speaks on some of India's most sensitive women's problems. She speaks frankly and without reluctance about the challenges that Indian women face. In her works, she describes the events in detail. And it is for this reason that she stands out among Indian English literature's other authors. She covers the concerns of all kinds of women in her books, although she concentrates on contemporary, educated, and self-assured women in rising Indian culture. Shobha De is constantly concerned about the plight of women in our society. She seeks to portray the wretched position of women and patriarchal society's contradictory behaviour via her writings. Shobha De emphasizes on the growth of female characters in her stories since women are the protagonists. Her heroes are solely interested in city life. She depicts the plight of women in metropolitan areas in her works. As we all know, women in rural and urban areas suffer quite distinct issues, and Shobha De chose to focus on women in metropolitan areas in her novels.



The Portrayal of Women in Shobha De's *Starry Nights*:

Starry Nights, like all her novels, depicts a woman's struggle against societal evils. In the novel, a woman tries to find a name and a position in a society dominated by males, where slogans like "men for the field, women for the house" are common. *Starry Nights* is the narrative of a woman named Asha Rani, through whom Shobha De attempts to portray the frightening face of Bollywood, in which women are pushed to surrender their self-respect and bodies. Shobha De seeks to portray the mental and psychological harassment, marginalisation, and tormenting of women that are not frequent among India's rural and ignorant people via her works. Its more frightening aspect may be observed in India's elite society and among the educated. Aasha Rani was pushed to enter the film business by her mother due to the poor state of her family. She describes her early adversity as follows: "You don't know my childhood, ... I never had anything to play with- no toys, nothing" (*Starry Nights* 8).

In her childhood, her father abandons her and her family. Her mother experiences hardship, suffering, and difficulty in order to raise her three kids. When Asha joined the business, cunning men like Kishenbhai and Gopal Ji, Sethji, and others were ready to trap her. They tried to take advantage of her ill health, as Kishenbhai put it: "Aasha Rani, sweetheart, separate your legs; you can part with your money afterwards" (*Starry Night* 18). Aasha Rani has disliked males because men have attempted to seduce her since she was a toddler.



Shobha De presents us with the physical and emotional abuse that women in our film business face via this book. Women in contemporary culture strive for recognition and renown by working hard. They will not be able to succeed if they are unwilling to obey the desires of the producer, director, or distributor. It is a well-known aspect of the current scenario, whether we are talking about the film business, the corporate sector, or the government. If women want to be successful, they must be willing to compromise in some way.

Aasha Rani was well aware of what was going on with her. Despite the fact that Kishenbhai is using her and Aasha Rani is quietly allowing it due of her work and family, she breaks the ice when Kishenbhai raises his finger on her character. One cannot deny that Kishenbhai assists Aasha Rani, but he soon turns Aasha Rani into his slave. He used to treat Aasha as if she were a prostitute or a piece of property. He not only exploited her physically, but he also pushed her to sleep with his friends. Other women, in addition to Aasha Rani, are also victims and sufferers in this patriarchal culture. One of them is Malini. She is another to Akshay's children, and a homemaker. She was a gazal singer before she married, thus she had her own identity. However, after marriage:

Malini had promptly been converted into the film industry's Bhabhi Ji. her singing came to a full stop as per marriage contract and only time she permitted herself. She left singing because she signed a contract before marriage that she would never sing after marriage and only will take care of Akshay and his family.
(Starry Night 78)



Malini is a strong lady who is doing all she can to salvage her marriage. She attempts to handle the problem on her own, without the help of Akshay. Malini is astute enough to rescue her family from any adversity.

Aasha rani adores Akshay and is completely devoted to him. She is willing to go to any length for him, and she freely embraces his love. But family comes first for Akshay. He refuses to acknowledge his relationship with Aasha Ran. He merely used her, and when he became bored of her, he insulted her in front of the public and the media:

‘Before she could finish her sentence, he’d struck her... She looked stunned- he struck her again. By then, Malini had joined him. She screeched, ‘Beat the bitch! Kick her out! How dare she come here!’. One more blow across her mouth and Aasha Rani fell to the floor. Akshay kicked her prostrate form and ground the heel of his shoe into the side of her face. (Starry Night 124)

Women grew aware of their rights as education expanded, and as time passed, they became more conscious of their rights and responsibilities. Shobha De's wives are dissatisfied with their home life. They want to hold a prominent position in society. Marriage and children aren't the only things that provide people joy. They want the same chances, privileges, and treatment as males. They despise societal restrictions that place women in a subordinate position. They want total control over their money as well as complete control over their guys. Shobha De's heroines are not looking for sympathy. They also want to be powerful on that level so that they may assist others. They do not hesitate to embrace jobs that are not considered to be beneficial for women in the process of becoming self-sufficient.



These career women are there for their spouses and families. As Asha Rani does in the book, she enters the film business.

Shobha De' conveys her life experiences in a very nice way. She is well-connected in the modelling business, which is closely linked to the film industry. She married a businessman and, as a result, she is now a part of the corporate world. She resides in Bombay and has seen women being exploited in the modelling, film, and business worlds. As a result, she gives a fairly accurate image of women's physical and emotional harassment. Her heroines are mostly from the modelling, business, and film worlds. As a result, we see a genuine picture of women's exploitation in these locations.

Shobha De freely discusses her lesbianism. She addresses this subject directly in her writings. She isn't afraid to speak about the female-female connection. She considers lesbianism to be a kind of feminism. She depicts a lesbian connection between Linda and Asha Rani in her book *Starry Nights*.

Shobha Dein *Starry Nights* depicts a lesbian romance between two female characters, Asha Rani and Linda. Linda works in the film business as a journalist. But this isn't Asha Rani's first time; she's had a lot of girlfriends before Linda, and she's enjoyed this kind of relationship in the past as well. Asha Rani has no qualms about expressing her lesbianism. She is more at ease in the arms of a feminine body than in the arms of a man body. Linda becomes a true friend to her, understanding her thoughts and meeting all of her physical and emotional requirements. Her complete satisfaction with a female companion is the emergence of a 'new woman' who is able to have pleasure without a man- a woman who does not need a man.



Shobha De' is quite methodical when it comes to dealing with Mumbai's sexually exploited movie stars. In Aasha Rani's sexual experience with Seth Amirchand, he describes sex exploitation in its most bare form. He is a businessman who had artificial sex with Aasha Rani by implanting a diaphragm into her body. He gives her a medicine to help her live longer. Despite the fact that Aasha Rani's body is incompatible with such wild sex, she is subjected to severe sexual and physical torment in the hopes of realizing her love for Amirchand. Aasha Rani is hoping beyond hope to capture his heart, since he is almost callous and treats her like a beast, even striking her in the face. When it comes to Aasha Rani, Amirchand is just thinking about sexual pleasure.

The reader is upset by Aasha Rani's sexual representation, which does not provide sensuous pleasure. The backdrop of the film industry, with its blatant reality of sexual exploitation, is a novel discovery in literature. 'Shobha De' is the first writer to dare to paint a true image of the glamour world and to educate readers about the film industry's invisible side.

When Aasha Rani is ridiculed and abused by Akshay and his wife Malini, her situation becomes terrible. She goes into a frenzy of irritation and pressure right away. Life is a harrowing experience, and it is, in Shakespeare's words, "the narrative recounted by an idiot." The humiliation and physical abuse have left Aasha Rani so stunned and saddened that she considers suicide. It is both the greatest and worst of her time. It is the ideal moment for her since she is at the pinnacle of her fame. It's the worst possible moment for her since all of the males she loves have turned away from her after being physically seduced.



Aasha Rani is represented as a Bollywood actor by Shobha De, who portrays her as though she was born to suffer and be tormented. Though the reader, Aasha Rani, knows the hardship of famous actresses who burn like candle wax to bring light and warmth. Aasha Rani meets Abhijit Mehra, a disgraced industrialist who is married and has a nice family life, for the second time. He wants to take Aasha Rani to satisfy his need, but he wants to retain his relationship with her to satisfy his sexual urge. Aasha Rani has a lot of experience and maturity when it comes to researching the psychology of men in love. She deduces from her observations that Mehra's heart does not beat with love for her, but rather with desire for Aasha Rani. He has his own wife, Nikita, who is a beautiful, bright, and well-paid lady with a reputation as a well-known London lawyer. Aasha Rani hopes against hope that her wish for Mehra would come true. Abhijit is a reasonable, calculating, and pleasure-seeking individual who derives the greatest benefit from his association with Aasha and then abandons her when his desire is satisfied.

Aasha Rani is very dissatisfied with her lack of success in finding a life mate. She is a famous actress who has gained name, fame, and fortune, but her existence seems to be meaningless without a close friend. She meets one guy after another in her pursuit for genuine love, but she eventually concludes that true love is only attainable and practical in the utopian world or in the world of cinema. She finds no young man's heart pulsing with love for her; instead, they are all money-making machines chasing women for sex and nothing more.



Conclusion:

Shobha De, a proponent of women's rights, is dedicated to determining the root reasons of anguish experienced by women who do not adhere to social norms. She stresses the changing perceptions of women and the opportunities for them to live independent lives. Her ladies do not believe in the shackles of marriage, especially when their independence is on the line. She exposes the pitiful truth of contemporary metropolitan women's existence, in which they are oppressed because of their gender. As a result, many seek sexual activity outside of marriage as a sense of liberation. She mocks Indian society's hypocrisy in allowing males who seek sexual freedom to do so. Women, on the other hand, are strongly exhorted to satisfy their sexual desires via their spouses. De's ladies defy the societal norm that a married lady may only have sexual satisfaction inside the confines of her marriage.



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