

FROM REPRESSION TO SANGUINESS WITH REFERENCE TO DE'S SELECT PROTAGONISTS

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Culture exists within the meaning, making of individuals and groups through the relationships formed in communication. It can be defined in the following terms, "Culture is an assemblage of imaginings and meanings that are generated by a given social group. These meanings may be consonant, disjunctive, overlapping, contentious, continuous or discontinuous. The given social group may be formed around a broad gradient of human communities, activities and purposes" (Lewis 18).

Culture and society is not the same thing, though they are clearly contingencies of one another. Individuals belong to various forms of social grouping, each within their own 'cultures'. This means that one can speak of their family culture, national culture, ethnic culture, global culture, work culture, a religious culture, a gay culture and so on. A number of these cultures are attracted to major social institutions which can assert considerable influence over its constituency. All cultures macro and micro operate through particular discourses, rules, belief systems, values, rituals and practices that are imbued with meaning. Part of this meaning making involves the construction of an individual personal identity through the internationalization and re-projection of attributes that are specific to that particular culture.

In a complex modern society, where an individual may participate in a range of different groupings and hence cultures, identity formation may produce contradictory effects. Thus an individual may encounter more or less contention between various cultural affiliation and source of identity construction.

In cultural studies the language is always formed in terms of a specific political space: i.e. it is positioned in accordance to analysis, own views, modes of reading and expressivity. It is a subject pertaining to complexion of power, meaning-making and about the dispute. It is observed:

Most cultural analysts use theory and conceptual frameworks in order to identify, clarify and speculate over specific cultural sites and issues. Some cultural theorists seek to establish the conceptual parameters within which cultural analysis should take place. They raise questions such as; What is culture? What is the appropriate focus of cultural studies? What is the relationship between power and culture? What role do the media play in constructing culture? How does representation - including the aesthetics of representation-contribute to the formation of cultural knowledge and the cultural episteme? Are social practices more or less important than textual analysis (Lewis 29).

The critical part of cultural studies is the formation of concepts. A concept provides a lens through which to view cultural sites and practices. The cultural theory frames question directed towards a specific text, policies, social practices, institutions and relationships. Shobha De, as a novelist picks up the issues pertaining to better understanding in patriarchal culture. The reading of her novels seems to project that they challenge the traditional ways and values. Meerabai quotes:

Women who conform to the existing moral ethics and code and social norms, especially with regard to their relationship with men and reactions to familial frictions, are certainly traditionalist.

Those who defy traditions and opt for modernity are non-conformists. Conformity to a pattern does not mean dumb acceptance of all that is thrust on them. It takes for granted a certain degree of willingness and whole-hearted acceptance. Conformists hold on to the set of traditional values; sometimes, even at the cost of individual happiness. A tradition-abiding woman even sacrifices her happiness for the well being of the family, but at the same time retains her individuality. (Meera Bai 35).

It is seen that Shobha De sees her protagonists as: “a woman is seen as a beautiful pulp and a piece of flesh, which is a perfect prey for lustrous eyes of cultured-vultured men who have cupidity for each and everything by hook or crook” (Gupta 261)

Her novels represent the protagonists challenge to the patriarchal society. Her women prove to be highly individualistic, calculative and self-centered in a tradition bound society. In fact, their desire for independence forces us to feel that they are blunt and undecorative in a society which is governed by the male domination. Sonia Ningthoujam observes:

She writes freely, using sexually explicit words without any fear of disapproval from the average conservative Indian reading public. She writes unhindered and unmindful of the hostile criticism of her novels generally regarded as obscene and pornographic. But the educated middle class women admire her for her boldness to cut across the conservative morality (Sonia Ningthoujam 47).

These women try to bring out new pattern of values and a new set of values. As a result, they prove to be independent, assertive and conceived as a new breed of woman. These make anyone to think that they are for transition or change. The writer always keeps in his mind about the accepted social values and norms which constitute the morals of the society. But, De, with her ‘new humanism’ and ‘new morality’ try to project that woman is not a “sex object” (De 50)

An age which resorts to new morality based on mutual love, uninhibited communication and freedom from phobia, according to Sahgal ‘create the “oxygen of understanding” which can save the present generation from the explosive psychic trauma of marital conflict’ (Sahgal 104).

In De’s novel the writer tries to prove that her women characters are not willing to be placed ‘second to men’. In fact, they try to seek true companionship with men, who are reluctantly supplying luxury, money and comfort. Though these women marry for convenience, they are alienated and this push does not nag them. To overcome the nausea they resort to glamorous and challenging careers like modeling, acting, journalism, designing, advertising and doing business. Normally, a woman, who belongs to traditional middle class, has a fear to come out of her cocoon which is shaped by her family and society. But, women who belong to the category of Shobha De, who seem to be modern, sophisticated and western, exhibit the trait of courage and daring revelation.

The standard of morality in Shobha De’s women has gone up because of their education and wealth. This has changed their outlook because they have a sense that they are slowly ‘raising their head’ in the fast changing world. So they are labeled as ‘new emerging women’ who aspire for comfort and independence in their life.

In Shobha De’s *Sisters*, Mikki and Alisha Hiralal try to be vociferous and independent. They seem to be busy and try to carry on the family legacy by taking over the industry of their dead father. ‘They have an urge to be the best’ in every field. Amrita Aggarwal, in *Strange Obsession*, is another

challenging woman. She is even ready to travel alone from Delhi to Mumbai to take up modeling. Her lesbian relationship with Minx (Meenakshi Aiyengar) proves that the new women's desire for fulfillment even within her own sex is clearly seen in the women of Shobha De. These women show a desire to prove that they need not depend on 'man's company'.

Moreover, when the protagonists of Shobha De try to shatter the age old concept of traditional Indian women with their carefree attitude towards life, this attitude forces them to have an image that they are new women trying to resort to freedom, including sex. AashaRani in *Starry Nights* shares a passionate relation with her journalist friend Linda. She concludes that her sexual experience with Linda is completely right and normal and enjoys full pleasure and complete ecstasy. Though, it is a kind of revolt in spirit, they seem to be all out to satisfy female urge within their own sex. In *Sultry Days*, Shobha De presents a group of modern women. Karen, an affluent house wife, feels proud of her exotic components. Shona, Feroze, Kiki and all try to be 'ideal' with 'new aesthetic pre-occupations'. In Shobha De's *Snapshots*, Swati, a modern urban woman, plans to meet her school friends Reema, Aparna, Surekha, Rashmi and Noor. Swati is the most powerful woman among them. She demonstrates her control over men. These women by transforming themselves into bold and daring try to show that they are 'not mere commodities' but 'individuals with real flesh and blood'.

The value system and morality undergo a rapid change among the protagonists of Shobha De. As a result, the hierarchy of males feels that they are in jeopardy and no longer in a position to exercise their power over the female world. This new morality is visible in ShobhaDe's image of new woman.

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