
Mapping Metropolitan Life in the Selected Novels of Shobha De

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Abstract

Shobha De's fictions provide a thoughtful perspective on the complexities of urban life in India, especially the social dynamics of Mumbai. This research paper analyzes De's portrayal of urban experiences in De's novels *Socialite Evenings* (1989), *Starry Nights* (1991), *Sisters* (1992), and *Snapshots* (1995), focusing on themes such as consumerism, gender roles, personal freedom, social mobility, class division, and identity crisis. The paper examines the representation of the ambitions, worries, and dreams of the upper-middle and influential classes in the swiftly evolving cultural surroundings of post-liberalisation India. The study focuses on key thematic dimensions, including consumerism, gender roles, individual freedom, social class division, and identity crises. It explores how De's characters find ways to the attractive yet competitive terrain of Mumbai, a city portrayed as both enabling and unforgiving. Using a qualitative research design, the study offers close textual analysis to examine the influence of metropolitan environments on characters' psychology, relationships, and ambitions. Secondary scholarly sources are integrated to contextualize De's narratives within the broader discourse of postmodern India, where rapid economic growth has reshaped social behaviour and cultural expectations.

De presents Mumbai as a charismatic yet ruthless urban sight, where ambition grows bigger amid moral ambiguity. Her female characters deal with traditional patriarchal structures with strength, independence, and a lot of emotional depth. The study concludes that Shobha De's novels offer a significant literary representation of late twentieth-century Indian urbanity. Her fictions disclose dynamic social, cultural, and psychological patterns that persist in shaping metropolitan life in modern India.

Keywords: Dysfunctional relationships, emotional alienation, feminine autonomy, feminist urbanism, metropolitan subculture, spatial agency

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Introduction

The Indian metropolitan city of Mumbai stands as a powerful symbol of rapidly transforming society. The society therein is shaped by globalization, liberalization and urbanization. Mumbai is both a cultural and a financial capital city of India. The city embodies the contradiction of modern urban life marked by economic prosperity alongside social inequality, individual freedom alongside moral anxiety, and aspiration alongside alienation. In Indian fiction after 1990, the metropolis has emerged not only as a backdrop but as an active force that forms identities, relationships, and value systems. The Indian traditions are found to have been confronting modernity, and personal autonomy seems to be negotiating with entrenched social norms.

Shobha De occupies a significant position as an eyewitness to metropolitan life. She is very familiar with Mumbai's elite social circles, media culture, and entertainment industry. De fictions offer an insider's perspective on the psychological and cultural realities of urban existence. She presents, in a realistic way, the lives of the upper-middle and elite classes—particularly women—who navigate power, desire, ambition, alienation, and transformation within a consumer-driven, media-saturated urban environment. Shobha De is not preoccupied with poverty-afflicted marginality, but portrays the characters who are involved in metropolitan life and influenced by the razzle-dazzle and competitiveness.

Novels such as *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights*, *Sisters*, and *Snapshots* provide nuanced portrayals of the urban Indian psyche, addressing issues such as evolving gender roles, social stratification, aspirational lifestyles, moral ambiguity, and the pursuit of personal autonomy. De's characters are frequently positioned at the intersections of gender, class, and consumer culture, revealing how metropolitan spaces influence emotional relationships, ethical choices, and self-fashioning. Her narratives thus offer fertile ground for examining the cultural consequences of rapid urban transformation in contemporary India.

This paper analyses the way Shobha De maps metropolitan life through her selected novels, which focus on recurring patterns like social mobility, identity formation, consumerism, interpersonal relationships and the quest for selfhood in urban India. Using a literary-sociological framework, involving urban theory and feminist approaches, the paper will examine the effects of the metropolitan environment on human behaviour, relationships and values. Although the criticism that has been extant in the past has labelled De as sensational or simply popular in her fiction, this paper suggests that her novels have much to say about the socio-cultural relationships of post-liberalisation cities in India.

The concept of the “urban tribe” is an important conceptual lens that is used in this study. It is a term which was coined by French sociologist Michel Maffesoli. He employed the term to refer to informally related social networks based on common ways of life, preferences and cultural behaviors instead of conventional identities like religion or ethnicity. These groups are usually categorized according to the profession, leisure culture, fashion or media affiliation and indicate new kinds of social belonging in urban situations. The existence of such urban collectivities is evident in De’s novels, especially those in which the media professionals, the film insiders, and social elites all operate under the influence of consumption, visibility, and networking to construct their identities.

Interdependence between literature and society is another aspect that supports this analysis. Literature does not originate in a vacuum, as Wellek and Warren (1956) claim, but rather shares and recreates the prevailing social trends during its creation. Indian English literature, particularly women writing has been most receptive to the transforming city realities. According to critics like Taneja (2005), authors like Shobha De are more sensitive to changes in gender norms, mobility in classes and values in metropolitan India. De recreates the atmosphere of materialism, individualism, and ethical ambiguity that defines the metropolitan elite of former India through her depictions of ambitious, self-conscious main characters within the context of the media, fashion and movie industries (Ghosh, 2014). This study will address a critical gap by studying how Shobha De portrays urban life in her novels and tries to provide a detailed mapping of metropolitan life in her novels of choice. It underscores the way that urban Indian women deal with ambition, identity and survival in an urban setting that is fast modernising. This way, the paper is a contribution to a larger discourse on the topic of Indian city literature, as well as it enriches our comprehension of the cultural and psychological aspects of metropolitan life in the present day.

Review of Literature

Shobha De is referred to as the chronicler of contemporary urban India in the late 1980s and early 1990s due to her uninhibited depiction of women who had to deal with the challenges of urban life. Her most read novels-*Social Evenings* (1989), *Starry Nights* (1991), *Sisters* (1992), and *Snapshots* (1995) provide a panoramic sight of the elite strata of Mumbai where the themes of materialism, gender, sexuality and identity are addressed in a post-liberalization setting. The insight of her sociocultural commentary has not gone unnoticed, and this has been propelled by a realist style, which has incorporated personal accounts with the pulse of the town as a whole. Giving theory that will underpin this research, this literature review will discuss academic

literature about how De portrays urban life where it is possible to outline the knowledge that has been well-established, and the prospects that can be explored in further research.

This occurred due to the advent of economic liberalization in India in the 1990s, which came along with financial opportunities as well as a distinct consumer culture. This change has been attributed by scholars to the fiction of De, a prolific illustration of the life and deregulatory spirit of both the Indian middle and upper-middle classes. The essay by Monika Gupta, *The modern Urban Life: A Study of Socialite Evenings* by Shobha De, focuses on the way that De lists the materialistic longings of urban residents in that wealth can enrich and also make their lives a hollow one. The contemporary Bombay has also been portrayed in the early novels by Shobha De where money and materialism have hypnotized both men and women.

De's representation of metropolitan consumer culture can be read alongside Gokulsing and Dissanayake's (2012) analysis of globalization and Indian identity. Performative pursuits of status are exemplified by the protagonists, who are socialites, models, and even spouses. The consumer-centric identity of her work is the foundation of her urban representational aesthetic. As sprawling cities grow, micro-communities emerge within them, providing a useful lens for exploring them. Iljung Kwak et al. (2013) define urban tribes as "loosely organized social clusters" centred on shared taste, aesthetics, and belonging. These tribes—punks, goths, bikers, and preppies—crystallize in De's work, especially in *Starry Nights*, where Aasha Rani inhabits Mumbai's glamorous nightlife and media circuits, forming alliances and identities with similar others.

Critics point out that De uses these clusters of lifestyles as a highlight of a fragmented but vibrant urban sociology, producing a mosaic that contrasts sharply with the traditional image of unified Indian areas. Lefebvre (1991, p. 26) states that fragmentation witnessed in urban life is not only determined by geographical physical setting but also social interactions, symbolic signification as well as commodified cultural practices. Harvey's (2005, p. 2) analysis of neoliberal city-making, as political-economic ideology, which alters the city in line with market principles, can explain the market-driven ethos and privatization of De in his fiction. She describes the origin of the subcultural capital in a media saturated world, how it can liberate and divide people. One of the major issues in her work is the liberation of women, their sexuality, and their resistance against the patriarchal restrictions. Anita Ghai states that the heroines in De are a significant break of the code of narratives since they do not fit the pattern of women who tolerate abusive, unsatisfying, or uncomfortable relations. In his article in *Redalyc*, Ghai considers the novel *Socialite Evenings*, *Sisters*, and *Starry Nights*, which concentrate on the feelings and desires of women and their power.

Aasha Rani, as in the case of *Starry Nights*, has used her sexuality as a tactic to enter the Bollywood world. According to the scholarly discourse, including that of Ghai, De is not afraid of reflecting on the issue of sexuality and female ambition in a male-controlled industry. As the protagonist negotiates power through intimacy, De foregrounds sex as both an economic tool and a site for female assertion. In *Sisters*, Premalatha and Deivasigamani examine the portrait of upper-class women manoeuvring between familial tradition and personal freedom. They highlight De's balancing act: depicting modern femininity without discarding cultural moorings. *Snapshots* receives attention in Chavan's article for its representation of urban women writing about their lives in a clinic-of-candid form, a performative act of storytelling that amplifies women's voices within media-savvy societies.

Mumbai's identity is inseparable from media culture and the film industry, and De's novels reflect this deeply. *Socialite Evenings* details characters' entry into modelling, television writing, and advertising—mirroring Shobha De's own career trajectory. The novel explores bored housewives who enter careers after experiencing saturated social lives. In *Starry Nights*, De lifts the curtain on Bollywood's underbelly—exposing sex, exploitation, ambition, and celebrity as mechanisms that mould both personal identity and public representation. The similarity of the newspapers, gossip magazines, and tabloids only confirms the notion that Mumbai is a media city where image and scandal are traded.

Reports on Bollywood like *Ganti Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema*, elaborate on the gendered labour context of the filmmaking industry and legitimizes the descriptions of casting, production, and negotiation of sexual power to achieve professional advantage as portrayed by De. To see how De's characters make their way in the city life, the urban theory comes in handy. The larger theoretical context is described by Wellek and Warren, saying that there is no such thing as literature created in a vacuum, but it is still influenced by social institutions and elements. Furthermore, the urban scholars such as Majhee (2025) emphasize the fact that cities are imagined spaces, which are shaped by migration, infrastructure, and cultural interactions, and this fact can be applied to the urban settings that De communicates.

De projects Mumbai not merely as a setting but as a working, functioning social organization: its clubs, hotel bars, modelling shows, film sets, luxurious apartments, and newspaper offices are all places of both possibility and unveiling. These areas mediate gender acts, social mobility and group identities- they reflect modern theories concerning fractured and fluid identities in mega-cities (Kern, 2020). Although the literature on De discusses gender,

sexuality, and media representation, the limited literature outright associates the three themes in the overall framework of a mapped metropolitan life. The studies are inclined to atomize the novels of De per the theme, such as materialism, erotic agency, or media images, instead of analyzing the ecosystem of a whole life in the metro: labour, consumerism, gender negotiation, spatial belonging, and subcultural life (Hebdige, 1979). That is the gap that this project is going to fill, as it seeks to demonstrate how the novels by De are an interwoven narrative tableau of urban mechanics: how this or that class, gender relations, consumer desire, media industries, and city subcultures constitute a subjectivity of the individual and collective identity. It is in this manner that De invokes the feminist urban cultural theory to explain the ways of how metro spaces are gendered, economic, and symbolic spaces. It correlates with such scholarship as Therese Hanssen researches on metropolitan identities and performance, Nancy Fraser's theories of cultural recognition and redistribution. To the urban narratives of De, space is not neutral in the sense that it organizes the power relations based on visibility, mobility, inclusion, and capital.

The novels of Shobha De have received a considerable scholarly interest, especially regarding the themes of gender, sexuality and urban life in the post liberalization India. The representation of women as bold, sexually independent, and opposed to conventional norms has been pointed at by critics on several occasions. As an example, Ghai (2018) observes that the protagonists of De are not the kind of women who tolerate abusive, unsatisfying or uncomfortable relationships. Scholars have explored the way the characters in De deal with the challenges of the urban life in terms of class and consumerism. Indicatively, Chandini Moses (2013) writes about De women characters that are always willing to stand up against the taboos set in the society. Also, the author of this paper, Premalatha (2019), reviews the treatment of women in the film *Sisters of De*, with the emphasis on a group of elite and upper-class women and how they struggle to blend tradition with modernity.

Although these works offer insightful details on how De explores the issue of gender and class, there is still a literature gap on the precise patterns of living in Indian metropolitan cities that are portrayed in her novels. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how De narrates the lives of metropolis by superimposing her fictional texts on the theme of social mobility, identity construction, consumerism, interpersonal relationship as well as self-seeking in the urban Indian setting. The characters of De travel to major cities and nations to expand their trade and commerce. In *Starry Nights*, Aasha Rani, a girl from a tiny village, reaches the pinnacle of stardom. Even she immerses herself in the orgy of blue flicks and discriminatory sex in the vulgar world of Bombay movies. Karuna, the protagonist of *Socialite Evenings*,

works at the Prithvi Theatre. In addition, she signed on for the film *Shakuntala* by Girish Sridhar. She also composes scripts for a big television network. A series sponsored by a soft drink manufacturer.

The economic circumstances of De's ladies are fairly robust. In colonial literature, women's quest for economic independence is either stigmatized socially or simply disregarded, but De's ladies see that economic freedom is a prerequisite for female liberation. They are often career-oriented individuals who are not financially dependent on males for survival. De has provided them with economic freedom or independence. She has introduced relevant economic dimensions of the power struggle. In this context, she uses the *Shooting from the Hip* style of writing. "Eventually, everything yields to money, the great equalizer. Without economic freedom, women cannot be considered independent. A free mind or spirit is useless so long as the body and soul are held together by someone else" (110). Economically independent Indian women are a separate species. These women are financially independent and serious in this respect; "take me seriously" was written all over their faces. Even at work, they wore professional attire and carried briefcases with burgundy tones. They were so dedicated to their work that it was almost disturbing. Workaholism has become increasingly fashionable among women (11).

An unanticipated growth in women's economic progress is surprisingly impressive. Women are gaining financial clout, and this development is astounding. They demonstrate greater ability and shrewdness than males in handling financial concerns and have no qualms about obtaining prominent positions in the economic world. Almost all of De's works focus on the evolving attitude of women. Aparna, the protagonist of *Snapshots*, is an Indian businesswoman who can fend for herself in a crisis (180).

Existing scholarship often positions Shobha De as both a provocateur and a cultural chronicler. Nevertheless, it has been focusing more on her novels as a subject area rather than on spatial theories of urban life. Incorporating conclusions concerning the sociology of lifestyles, the sociology of femininity and urbanism, media culture and subcultural identity, this review will give a scholarly path that seeks a more rounded approach to metropolitan life in the form of the map of De into fiction.

Research Methodology

The paper is guided by the various theoretical perspectives that cut across literature, space, gender as well as urban culture. The major conceptual bases are based on Henri Lefebvre

in his Space Theory, especially the concept of the social production of space, which helps comprehend how space is created, contested and inhabited in literary works. The Urban Political Economy by David Harvey is a critical analysis of the urban restructuring of Indian cities under neoliberalism and assists in giving the picture of the urban changes in the post-liberalization period. The study is also interacting with the works of the feminist urban theorists like Elizabeth Wilson and Leslie Kern whose works play a vital role in making the gendered experience of urban life decipherable. Also, the Subcultural Theory, especially the works of Dick Hebdige, is applied to define the reflection of urban tribes, youth culture, and identity politics in novels by Shobha De. Combined these conceptual tools assist the study in understanding the space or intersection of space with gender, class and identity in the metropolitan space of post-1991 India.

The study has a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach by combining the instruments of literary criticism, urban studies, gender theory, and cultural sociology. Close textual analysis of some of the novels that Shobha De wrote are used as the main method, which involves studying the structure of the narration, character development, the themes of the novels, and the questions of space. The analysis is put in the context of post 1991 India, where the economy was liberalised, there was high urbanisation, and social forces were also changing. Besides the primary textual review, the research includes the review of secondary sources, such as academic papers, book chapters, and critical essays concerning the fiction by Shobha De, as well as about the narrative of the city in Indian English literature. This mixed approach to methodology can be used to understand metropolitan life and its reflection in literature in a deep, stratified way.

Results/Findings

This study's primary findings demonstrate that across *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights*, *Sisters*, and *Snapshots*, Shobha De constructs a multi-layered portrayal of metropolitan existence—a tapestry woven with economic ambition, gendered labour, spatial dynamics, and subcultural identities. The experience of *Socialite Evenings* is an ideal example of how, with the help of labour and sexual capital, which are connected with the media, Karuna transforms into a high-profile Bombay socialite. She travels in a wealthy realm of the nightlife, photo shoots, and brand parties, but she faces emotional confusion in a loveless marriage and shallow relationships. *Starry Nights* is an imaginative prelude to Aasha Rani ascending to the Bollywood world, which is full of exploitation. Parmar and Kapoor find the degradation of morals in her sexuality and media affiliations. In the movie *Sisters*, Mallika picks up the business empire of her father and fights against not only the family opposition but also the gender division of labour.

Feminist readings by Premalatha (2015) and Deivasigamani bring out her twofold battle in the economic realm of capitalism and the patriarchal family. Snapshots presents autobiographical snapshots of Mumbai professionals compelled to overcome infidelity, sexual agency and emotional survival. A. This has been placed by Rama Subbiah's analysis as a re-appropriation of narrative power in hypermediated city living. Subversion and resistance are the result of the urban female manipulation of media representation so that they can have agency.

The novels of Shobha De are always characterised by the changing economic agency of the women in the urban setting of India. The fact that she has portrayed women heroes in many of her novels, like *Sisters* and *Starry Nights*, shows that there has been a major change in the gender roles especially regarding money independence, entrepreneurial aspect, and inheritance to the family. The best example of this theme can be found in *Sisters*, when an U.S.-educated MBA graduate Mikki gets access to the business empire of her father Seth Heera Lal after his death. At the start, being mentored by Raman Bhai, a personal secretary of her father, Mikki immediately proclaims her power and ability to perform all the functions of the company. She concludes, my gender is the same as that of my father, even though my gender is not the same as my father's. I am determined to ensure that the firms do not fail through default. I will learn what I need to know and hire anybody who I consider competent enough (*Sisters* 30-31). This radical claim is a shift in genderized expectations of power and economic dominance.

The fact that women are shown as figures in the novel by De, who are economically independent also highlights another ideological change in metropolitan India. With economic independence, Chandran indicates that they are assertive, confident and unwilling to be used as doormats (2). The protagonists depicted by De are not merely financially empowered but also are not subject to exploitation and domination by their relatives, their love interests, and the rest of society.

These women, though rich, are usually faced with a moral quandary of choosing their own careers and doing the roles of the family. This contradiction is specifically noticeable in the film *Starry Nights*, when Aasha Rani, a prosperous movie actor, has to face the greediness of her mother: Funds, funds, funds. That's all you can think about? I am fed up with being your cash cow. When I finally did what I needed to do on behalf of others, I now wished to live my life and have fun (*Starry Nights* 106). In this outburst, De criticizes the commodification of women, including in the family arena, and shows how being financially independent does not always result in being emotionally free.

The works by De can also provide an insight into a dual consciousness of a female protagonist: although she can move forward and rely on herself, she is still bound to the cultural norms and emotional attachments. It is this conflict between tradition and modernity that is unique to her description of metropolitan life. De intelligently tracks this struggle with the use of realistic characters that move around in Bombay in a complex socio-economic world. According to *The Business Standard*, such candour and a clear feeling are hardly common among Indian novelists, which explains the commentary, it is rare to find an Indian novelist with such candour and clear feeling (Feb. 1993). This openness enables De to establish a very clear microcosm of urban India in transition- the place of ambition, struggle, and identity are closely intertwined.

De's narratives, thus, trace the metamorphosis of the Indian metropolis, not only in the levels of its landscape or its roads, but also the changed ideologies and desires and social mobility of the Indian people living there. Her characters, particularly the female ones, are turned into the symbol of the contemporary Indian spirit: self-sufficient, assertive, yet at the same time, subjected to the expenses of a liberated life. Her novels, it is possible to say, serve as not only stories but also as types of socio-cultural documents of the lived reality of urban India.

Discussion

The research of this paper supplements and adds layers to the previous literature, making spatial and sub-cultural aspects come a little nearer to us, thereby making it much deeper to comprehend metropolitan urbanity in the fiction of De. Ghai (2018), and Premalatha (2019) apply strong feminist interpretations to *Starry Nights* and *Snapshots*, discussing how the city becomes a space of liberation and exploitation for women who live in the city. Their reviews indicate that the female characters of De make use of sexuality as a tactic and maneuver within systems of power in media and personal relationships. Parmar and Kapoor put this in the context of a transactional use of female sexuality, thus showing how women can utilize sexual agency to disrupt norm-based gender hierarchies. They point out that the image of De does not equate the deployment of sex with submission, but a compartmentalised refiguration of gendered power, which is also backed up by Ghai saying that the women of De do not consent to unsatisfying or oppressive relationships.

Spatial theory, including that of feminist critic Elizabeth Wilson, gives more insight into the *Sisters* film in which Mallika works within and against gendered corporate space. Wilson argues that urban zones of commerce (offices, boardrooms) are rife with gendered dynamics of opportunity and repression. Mallika's negotiation of these spaces functions as a

text-like act of resistance, reaffirming Wilson's idea that urban environments both reflect and shape gendered lived experiences.

The idea of subcultural theory (especially, the concept of urban tribes introduced by Kwak, Murillo, and Belhumeur, 2013) is proved by the fact that De also mentions nightlife and fashion subcultures. In *Starry Nights and Socialite Evenings*, De richly describes urban tribes like punks, goths and bikers - tribes that represent membership in an alternative urban subculture as well as being excluded by mainstream society. These spaces question traditional identity structures in postliberalization India and expose the fragmentation of urban belonging.

Through these lenses—sexual strategy, gendered labour in spatial contexts, and subcultural identity—Shobha De's metropolitan fiction can be seen as a form of spatial cartography. Her protagonists traverse a variety of material, sexual, cultural, and communal spaces, producing urban stories that defy simplistic narratives of modernization. Her novels illuminate how modern metropolitan women both exploit and resist the ambivalences of city life, creating new ways of inhabiting urban environments.

Colonialism had a crucial part in undermining Indian culture, in causing Indian men and women to stray from the ethical path, and bringing people to unhappiness, discontentment, and disobedience to the voice of the spirit. "Colonialism is the external domination of a region and its inhabitants. Imperial sovereignty that improves the imperial power's military security, economic benefit, and international reputation" (Plane, 26). Neocolonialism in the light of Cohen: Is there an obscured economic, political and military association between the more economically established country and the less developed one? It is a web of control processes one economy has on another" (11). It demonstrates that America and England, the neocolonial powers, impose their culture on less developed nations such as India through the employment of mass media such as television, radio, and print. They disseminate images of glitter, glamour, and grandeur, create exceedingly unsafe conditions, pervert the native culture, and strike where it hurts the most. Shobha De is a product of this complex context, and her literary works depict the transformation of Indian culture under the influence of neocolonial nations.

Shobha De's women depict themselves as technologically advanced, progressive, and ultramodern. They frequent restaurants, hotels, coffee shops, and clubs where they imbibe champagne, plan parties, talk sex and photographs, trade hearts and eyes, and engage in illicit physical contact without any sense of guilt. The most disgusting thing they do is have sexual relations with their blood or closest relatives, destroying the marital life of their siblings. Reema had an affair with her brother-in-law in *Snapshots*. They are drinkers who are accustomed to

cursing at ladies. In the novel, Reema makes a dirty remark about Rashmi's feet: "Have you ever seen her feet?" "All cracked and black, as if she worked in a coal mine or walked unshod for miles upon miles" (78).

Women have been subjected to patriarchal traditions such as marriage and Manusmriti for ages. The marginalization and persecution of women have been indispensable to the existence of patriarchal societies. Initially, though, male domination did not reach monster dimensions. Under their protective cover, women were content and get their due respect. Still, when the social structure changed due to the shift in the political and social concepts, women soon abandoned the safety of the house and helped their male companions in the implementation of social duties and tasks. They voluntarily took on the burden along with their traditional role, but it was not authorised, nor recognised, and thus they turned into a subject of social ridicule, offence and inquiry. De has picked this subject because she simply wants to show that women can defy centuries of culture and traditions, which to date have been a hard nut to crack, and in this task, women can afford to leave the path of ethos.

Marriage is the most crucial institution in the life of a human being and to a woman it represents a time of maturation; this is when the flower of life blossoms (39). The Dharma Shastras consider marriage a sacrament, but the concept has become irrelevant in contemporary times. Simone de Beauvoir states that the fate of society traditionally is marriage. According to history, marriage has been essential to human civilization regarding health (445). The institution of marriage has supplied societal essentials such as love, security, and children, but sexual promiscuity and women's economic freedom have encouraged dissatisfaction, infidelity, and divorce. The institution of marriage appears to be on the edge of disintegration. Women who are educated, self-assured, aggressive, and financially secure reinvent the institution of marriage. According to them, marriage is only a temporary contract. There is a lack of husband-oriented commitment, loyalty, honesty, and fidelity. In Islam, marriage between the closest cousins is permitted, but marriage between blood relations is forbidden. Noor and Nawaz, the genuine siblings in De's Snapshots, engage in an unlawful romance despite many warnings and persuasions.

The marriage, family, and work culture are publicly questioned and deconstructed in relation to women's home and non-domestic roles. According to De's women, marriage is only a contract to live a comfortable and pleasant life, which may be terminated at their will (*Shooting from the Hip*, 112). In the writings of Shobha De, marriage is not viewed as a necessity: "Who has knowledge about marriage? "I am content as I am" (27). Divorce is a typical occurrence. Rarely does a couple remain together to the end of their life. The marriage

is short-lived. Incompatibility, inconsistency, and unfaithfulness might be the primary reasons for their separation. The constancy and loyalty of these individuals in their behaviours and relationships are incomprehensible.

Their sexual activity is amoral and, in many instances, unnatural. The expedient relationship, which lacks love and sharing, emotional warmth, and mutual adultery, frequently fails, culminating in suicide, divorce, and dissipation. In *Snapshots*, the husband of Aparna runs away without even warning her: no hints, no arguments, no proposals, nothing (18). In addition, the father of Noor abandons her mother. Men and women divorce one another, and such a choice does not touch them. In *Socialite Evenings*, Anjali does not feel guilty in divorcing Ave and often changes her husband when she becomes disillusioned with their lifestyle and manners. Since her husband has taken another woman as his mistress, the elder sister of Karuna also decides to divorce her husband. De's ladies have varied marital statuses. Reema and Surekha are married housewives with arranged marriages in *Snapshots*. Rasmi is a virgin mother burdened with the duty of a scumbag child. Swati and Aparna have split up. Swati and her ex-husband live independently in London, but Aparna is unwilling to make the same mistake. Shobha De has violated all norms of propriety about marital affairs. Her ladies disregard the boundaries of decency and freely discuss sexual things; they also breach all sexual taboos with glee and enthusiasm. The writer has made enough audacious comments to talk about the topic, which is still taboo. In *Starry Nights*, Malini cries out to Aasha Rani, "I can't handle the notion of free sex!" Sex! That is all you have – SEX! That is what women like you use. Cheap bitches- part your legs and let any men in. SEX, SEX, SEX, DIRTY, FILTHY SEX! ... (21)

Men and women disregard conventional marriage; they have extramarital affairs, and they have no objections to one another in this respect. In *Socialite Evenings*, Anjali's husband sleeps in his own home with other women, and his wife does not complain because she is connected with other men. They feel no remorse for engaging in illicit relationships or affairs with anyone other than their wives. Aparna has sexual contact with Prem in *Snapshots*. Alisha, one of the main characters in *Sisters*, is antagonistic to patriarchal male society and motivated to destroy the traditional image of women. She is bold in her career and has no qualms about free sex and can use men as toys or use them as instruments. The protagonist of the same story Mikki, turns his back on Navin and starts having constrained sexual relationships with Binny Malhotra. She is free, uninhibited and excited to the extent of primaeval abandonment by breaking all the taboos (486). Consequently, both Mikki and Alisha are without any sense of regret and even have an insatiable sexual hunger. Taarini, even a middle-class lady, is involved in prohibited affairs and betrays her family without experiencing the normal remorse.

In *Socialite Evenings*, Karuna even had an affair with Krish, and she believes that it was sinless. She is very unashamed to proclaim her affair: I like this guy of yours, and I will be completely disappointed after. The character Sujata in the *Sultry Days* by De is ugly and distasteful even in the middle age. She does sexual poems, and she does not respect the institution of society. We have the neurotic and hungry Anjali, the beautiful and lively Ritu who wishes to live with a smuggler after abandoning her second husband, and the heroine Karuna who marries a rich businessman but cannot find him appropriate in *Socialite Evenings*. In her opinion, he is boring, uninteresting and uneducated. Anjali suggests to her that she have an affair as a remedy to her boredom with her husband. Her friend, Ritu, who knows how to flirt, tells her about the rules of adultery: no one can call on Sundays, no one can call at home, letters are to be burned shortly after reading and no gifts. (25)

The themes of female independence and existential dissatisfaction within the disposition of urban modernity are the main thread of the fictions of Shobha De. They emphasize the fact that women such as Karuna refuse to accept the traditional role of a mother and family life, and would prefer to have personal freedom and mental health. The fact that Karuna aborted her pregnancy and regretted this decision is what highlights the emotional effects of such decisions, and that freedom of societal conventions is not necessarily fulfilling. The novel works by De also depict the emptiness and disconnection that define the lives of contemporary, urban women who are no longer in touch with the cultural values that their ancestors passed down to them. Even religion in this setting is reflected as a way of not being enough to provide solace, with a larger spiritual and emotional vacuum in metropolitan life.

These women, even though they are independent, are trapped in the restrictions of a contemporary culture that can only provide short-lived gratification. External in its empowering element, internally the idea of emancipation results in a feeling of imprisonment in a society that is not profoundly emotional and spiritual. Such a crisis of modernity, which is a psychological crisis, presents the conflict between the liberated external and the internal fulfilment. Nevertheless, the text also implies that these women are not just the victims of transformation in society. By defying men and conventional norms, they also add to what the text describes as an opposing culture a resistance movement that tries to break the patriarchal system and promote alternative ways of life. Shobha De argues that only a constructive and meaningful form of feminism can offer these women true comfort and solutions. Her women are fractured and emotionally thin-skinned but a quest to find a new identity and culture outside of patriarchy and empty modernity. The theme therefore highlights the necessity of a feminism that is not only critical of the status quo but also offers a source of emotional strength, cultural revitalization and inner existence amid a fast paced and urbanizing world of metropolitan India.

Shobha De has depicted ugliness, barbarism, and immorality in the actions and characters of males who, like women, are rootless and wander in an illusory world.

In the *Socialite Evenings*, the Sanyasi Baba ji of ochre colour is caught red-handed by the police but is soon released. It proves that these unscrupulous people have contacts with the vice politicians and the police to protect and defend themselves in case they fall into trouble. Ironically, Shobha De has illuminated the issue of child maltreatment in the metropolitan regions of our country. She indirectly suggests that contemporary moms have become money-centred, career-oriented and self-centred enough to ignore their parental role. The mother, with her soft and smooth touch on the back of a child and her kiss on his cheeks, which leaves a smile on his lips and shows him affection, is indifferent to her children. The mother, who has always been obsessed with child care, is suddenly perceived to be irresponsible. Her innate instincts of love and devotion appear to have evaporated in the materialistic breeze.

Modern metropolitan Indians are too busy to see a dying guy. But the picture in ancient times was opposite to this nature. Indian ancestors have always trodden the road of morality and integrity, of sincerity and chastity, goodwill and decency. They aided the hungry, defended the vulnerable, and comforted the despondent. They always supported the innocent, the devout, and the peaceful. They welcomed visitors, respected women, and rewarded the really deserving without regard to caste, race, nationality, or gender, but now, a new society devoid of all the aforementioned characteristics is emerging and expanding rapidly in all directions. The modern man is ruthless and heartless, self-centred, egocentric, lonely, and apathetic.

Conclusion

Through this study, one can show that the urban novels by Shobha De are not only tracing the new grounds in Indian English literature, but also tracing their identities through the intersections of their labor, space, subculture and sexuality. Her characters are not just citizens of the metropolis, but build it and are built into it, which demonstrates a tricky topography of urban life. The paper has distinguished four major overlapping aspects of De in her fiction: media work, ethical bargaining, space subject and subcultural identity as major aspects of interpreting her depiction of urban womanhood. These theoretical frameworks make the current literature more spatial and sociocultural in depth, providing more insights to literature and cultural studies, especially on the lived experience of women in post-liberalization India. The fiction by De is a photo album of current Bombay with its economic ambitions and cultural paradoxes. Her cities are glittering on the superficiality of gloss, but are shallow. In her depiction of characters, particularly that of women who explore privilege, performance

and pain, De criticizes a society in which money is the order of the day, corruption thrives, and spiritual void remains empty. Although the middle and upper-middle classes were outwardly lively and stylish, they are internally disunited because they are emotionally and morally disharmonized. Moreover, the novels by De are systematic in disrupting patriarchal systems as she undermines the traditional descriptions of the relationships between men and women. Her fiction features relationships, romantic, familial, and platonic, characterised by alienation and dysfunction in which she reveals the demise of old-fashioned complementarities. Her female characters, instead of trying to find support or validation in the hands of the male partners, tend to shun dependence and redefine feminine agency in an urban environment. As Sarbani Sen points out, De seems to emphasize the rise of a new code of morality that is practiced by a new generation of the neo-colonials, a group that no longer adheres to the cultural restraining values and indulges in irresponsible ways of living western-style lives. This fact supports the idea that De is a literary chronicler of modern urban conflicts, in which Westernization, consumerism, and renegotiation of gender collide. Further scholarship could develop this spatial-literary perspective to include the subsequent works by De, including *Second Thoughts* or *Speedpost*, to explore the additional ways in which digitalization, global mobility, and changing work cultures more clearly define urban identities. After all, De in her novels is not only a document of social life, but also a critical cartography with which she questions the changing lines of metropolitan life, as well as the strong, persisting spirit of the women who inhabit it.

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