
DEFENDING OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC POWER IN SHOBHAA DE'S *SULTRY DAYS*

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Abstract

The emergence of new woman is widely spread all over the world and thereby she is confident, assertive and independent in all the way. In fact the upcoming woman is very ambitious and so she does not depend on any man. She builds herself with multi-skills and thus walks in every field of the society. Though women meet various stresses and strains, yet their urge to create a full space for them has made them to carve, especially for economic power. In this way how Shobhaa De's Sultry Days, defend economic status is the main focus of this paper.

Keywords: Professional Women, Economic Power, Individuality

De is one of the most popular contemporary Indian novelists in India. Her popularity is evident with many books published on her and her novels. In short her books uphold healthy understanding of man-woman relationship. Most of De's novels indicate the arrival and changes with new Indian women who are eager to fight rebelliously against the patriarchal social system. She also tries to give especially her women characters their own identity in the society by making them bold and confident. The novel *Sultry Days* taken for the analyses of this paper, shows how all the characters are centrally drawn towards politics and it is also focuses on Indian women's active participation in becoming team leaders, managers etc in the corporate world, who struggle and finally become successful professionalist. Through this novel De has greatly opposed the gender discrimination in work place and has tried to show equal economic power to be shared by men and women. The novel *Sultry Days* opens with Nisha who met Den@Dev in the college canteen with a smelly beedies and ragged cloth. Others commented on Nisha's frowning face whereas Deb alone complemented it and this very soon made Nisha to get a friendship with him. She was fascinated to hear the story

of God and soon got attracted to him. She was crazy on his peculiar attitudes, his intellectuals, his abilities and talents in multi-skill. When Nisha learnt through God that he was financially down and he lived an inharmonious and loveless life, she helped him by paying for his petty expenses like beedies, teas, gifts etc. Even when God demanded money for expensive things to Nisha, she recalled as how her father denied her in getting various collection of things like Red shoes, dresses etc and how she was very much disappointed. So she had a concern as not to disappoint God and hence she fulfilled his need with great happiness. In fact, she was too fancied to help him financially and said, "I loved buying things for God. It gave me a sense of belonging" (SD, 22).

As Nisha wanted to balance her financial level and to earn more, she took up advertising field. Though this lousy job made her happy, she was very much bothered and got upset by God's selfishness. Yet she continued helping him in his need, as she was madly in love with him. One can witness the cheap image of men. Earlier men helped women but here a woman helped man. Modern women like Nisha are not dependent on their boyfriends or husbands for pocket money, because they know the power of money as they think that every relationship is maintained only through power, fame and money. Since women like Nisha want to be self-sufficient, they realize the need for their economic independence and gain it. Shobhaa De states in *Surviving Men*, "Yes, we know money is power. The person who controls the purse strings plays grand puppeteer. If the wife is wealthier, she is the one who makes her husband beg for pocket money" (XVIII).

Another instance one could find in the novel is two strong corporate women vampire one @Vimala and Vampire two @ Manju. Vimala who was a widow was a very "intimidating person". She was an archetypal workaholic and a perfectionist who controlled the entire department especially the personnel, by her sharp tongue and hard figure. Another woman was Manju. She was fair, flashy and got married twice and lived with Vikki, an executive manager in a hotel. Manju who was a careerist handled projects, marketing and was tough in negotiation. She did calculations and statistics without calculator, where even men were scared of her business dealings, as she was very much talented. As she was around the clock, she had no time to take care of either her children or her home. Besides, she also hated nursing her children and so planned to put her children in "The Divorce School". But Vikki, her husband worked in kitchen and took care of his children.

Bindiya, another example, was a corporate lady who was the epitome of confidence. She was a liberated Marwari lady who came from Calcutta to Bombay five years ago. Bindiya was well-educated and well informed, yet she was traditional. She got married in traditional fibre when she was in Calcutta. But her settlement in Bombay, changed her completely to pick up new style of living that let her to wander

freely. The freedom made Bindiya to become a chair person to a prestigious charity organization which was collecting funds for people who suffered in many ways and soon became a centre of attraction. She also changed her attitude, in response to the new social climate by smoking, drinking etc. whenever people mocked or criticized her negatively, she kept aside them and continued going forward with inflated confidence. Another instance is Tarantula. She was a talented professionalized person who hit an enormous success. As she was much commercialized, she had been identified with different labels as "monster", "Queen Bitch" etc. she challenged and did the work in different and new way. In fact, she gained a great reputation in an ad agency and changed all the old fashion into new. So to suit the office environment, she hired fresh graduates, who were bold and talented with good spirit. Similarly she planned every work, so as not to get delayed and took effort without compromise which helped her to attain success. She was a successful woman not only in ad agencies, but also in politics.

The novelist through above said women characters has depicted the confident corporate women. Many women like Vimala, Manju, Bindiya, Tanya felt happy for being a woman and considered it an advantage. For these women work became a fashion and thereby they also fell under the category of "New women" who were also looking for "New Men". The new men like Vikki could do all house works at home. These women believed that like men, even women could work or purse their careers successfully. They faced many difficulties and crudges in working environment as well as in their families. As De commented,

Corporate women suffer from both sides without knowing how to react. If they give time for their career, they are charged of being a 'hardcore'. If they ask for some liberty in timing, they are accused of being too demanding by their bosses and if they give up their career to focus on their family, husband and children, their wives hanging around at home and enjoying all the perks while contributing nothing to the family's income. Women accept that if they give up their job and concentrate on their family, they are openly criticized by their husbands and sometimes by their in-laws instead of being appreciated for their gratitude. (Criterion, 29)

In spite of various difficulties, new women reached success. As De said, the women once attained their financial growth, they were able to be dominant in any field, be it film industry, corporate sector, business etc. once she attained economic independence, she did not want to be dependent on any of her men like husband, father, or brother. The women characters in the novel also understood that they shouldn't be confined within four walls and hence getting into corporate sectors, they explored their talents, power, intellectual, with strong determination and perserverence to attain dignity, individuality and independence. One can also further understand that women are more judgmental of their potentials as well jobs give women confidence and an individual place for her. In short, today women have started

realizing their need and have started protecting themselves by being economically independent.

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