



QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN SHOBHA DE'S SNAPSHOTS - A STUDY

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Abstract

Snapshots is Shobha De's sixth novel published in the year 1995. *Snapshots* is completely a different novel as the title itself suggests 'snapshots'-a source of reminiscence. The novel revolves around the lives of six school friends who gather together after fifteen years of their departure from school. After meeting, everybody discusses their hidden secrets of past which still influences their present. The novel presents the lives of six women characters Aparna, Rashmi, Reema, Swati, Surekha and Noor. Each one of the women are trapped by patriarchal society and by their own social condition, while some struggle to come out of it and some become victims to their own condition. The present paper aims to deal with the theme of quest for identity of these six women characters of the novel.

Keywords: Shobha De, Quest, identity, society, women, reminiscence

Swati, the most progressive and career minded woman among the six school friends is the most important character of the novel. She goes in quest for her identity until she achieves it. She is the most ambitious girl right from the beginning of her school days. During her school days, Swati had aimed to win the 'Best Girl of the Year Shield' and started to work for it systematically and she felt that she was a natural winner with self-confidence and high spirit. But in spite of sheer hard work and determination of Swati for four years, the shield goes in hands of her best friend Aparna. Swati was greatly disappointed by her failure, as she had told everybody in the school that she would win the shield. She felt numb, angry and became very irrational as she even tried to commit suicide by consuming the rat poison, but saved. From then onwards Swati had a personal grudge against Aparna and wanted to hurt her but didn't do so. Yet still couldn't digest Aparna's win.

Later, Swati moved abroad in search for her identity and started working as an TV actress there and earned name and fame. At this time, she married a foreigner, but things didn't go well between them, as her husband felt that Swati was too much self-centered and had stopped respecting him. This made him to file for the divorce. Swati did not mind divorcing him too, as she made a deal before they got married that they are going to remain best friends as they are now, and nobody should become possessive about each other. But after marriage when confusion and misunderstanding emerged between them the couple decided to depart and carry on their lives individually. As Swati says:

We were a civilized British couple in the early seventies. Living in London. Every Marriage that we knew about ran along similar lines. Separate but friendly lives. There was nothing unique about ours. We loved each other dearly but we led strictly individual lives. And I missed him like mad when we finally split. (SS.202-203)

Swati, gave much importance to her career rather than her marriage, though she loved her husband unconditionally she gave up the marriage for the sake of her identity. She wanted to have independent thoughts and be on her own without interference from others. At that time Swati's career as an actress and singer was touching new heights and was reaping success. So she didn't want to distract herself from any kind of obstacles or barrier in her career. As Swati confesses:

I'd created such a huge sensation at that point with my first album and that number which shocked... off everybody. I was really big, big, big then. That was the time of that major concert – I forget what or who it was in aid of – Ethiopia? Lepers? Famine? Water? I was on the stage with the supernovas of the music world. I'd been offered abroad way role. So much, too much was happening all at the same time. (SS.203)

Swati was a celebrity in foreign land. She rose to fame and earned lots of money. Through this money Swati had been to Paris with her girlfriends and enjoyed with them the richness of the city. Later, Swati was offered one serial called "Maharani" and this serial changed the life of Swati, as she was supposed to play the role of "exotic, bejeweled Maharani with an insatiable sexual appetite that was to be a super specular shot on location in India. Initially, the British press were skeptical about Swati's role but later felt confident that Swati best suited for the role of Maharani. This serial turned out to be a major break in the career of Swati. After this break, Swati became more ambitious and wanted more and almost everything.

After the success of 'Maharani' all the viewers were mad after Swati, as they watched this serial during their leisure hours. Swati, retained attention from high profile entertainment executives and also made it in to the covers of most major fashion magazines and also on the number one society monthly 'Vanity Fair' which featured her in an eight-page profile. She was also dubbed by the 'The oriental Express' and even to that Swati launched a perfume called 'Maya' in Europe.

After acquiring huge success and identity, Swati was in America to sign the biggest contract of

her career, as this contract was so special to Swati that it would place her amongst the top entertainers of the world. The deal was for three years which would cover everything from films, concerts, videos to product endorsement. But at this time, she met Juan Mendonca, who was from Honduras. He was a millionaire who'd made his money buying and selling mega corporations. He was the most powerful man in his country and was known to play politics and traded on international exchanges. Juan was a divorcee when he met Swati on a flight and recognized her instantly and said - 'It is you, Mayadevi, yes'. He was very much attracted by her image on the TV screen and fell in love after meeting her. He proposed her then and there when Swati was about to sign a contract. He stopped her from signing and offered marriage proposal to Swati, as Juan said – "Tell me what, Swati'....let's forget about this particular contract. I'm offering you a better one. More permanent, Life – long in fact. Why don't you marry me?" (Ss.209).

Swati was surprised by the offers came into her way. She was confused either to accept the previous major contract of her career or the Juan's marriage contract. Juan, tried to clear her confusion by assuring that he was the owner of the company which Swati was supposed to sign a contract. Swati took her own time to think over the matter and even thought that Juan would make her a rich woman and moreover would provide security to her. She felt that Juan would be a great lover and moreover she loved his home, his style and almost everything of him. She thought that if things don't work out properly with him money would be there for her, and agreed to his marriage proposal, and got married to him and went to South America, for her honeymoon with him. During this period, she suddenly disappeared with her husband from her professional life and all her fans were in search for her.

But soon after the wedding, Juan was busy with his business throughout the world, and left to Argentina with Swati. There she was left alone while Juan was busy travelling for business purpose. Juan expected that Swati should appear to him like 'Maharani' every time he came back from his trips. Now Swati's only purpose in life was to please her husband Juan. At the moment she had neither her career nor independence. Her second marriage ended her identity, as her career had stopped, Swati herself admits the fact – "My career fell into pieces and I was virtually isolated from my friends my life in England." (Ss.214). Swati was into a meaningless marriage, as Swati says:

I got sufficient pocket money. But strictly no credit cards, no joint accounts and no access to Juan's real wealth. With my terrible habits, it didn't take me too long to blow it all up. And guess where most of it went? Straight up my nose! (SS,215).

Juan, was very much interested in animals and had a great passion of collecting endangered species. Among them Swati felt that she too was like a captive animal part of that zoo. She was imprisoned confining and suppressing her identity. It is marriage which takes away the real identity of a woman. Though Swati had married a foreigner thinking him to be modern in thoughts as he was in his attitudes but he too proved himself to be an ordinary husband who suppresses his wife's dreams and desires. But Swati was a strong woman who realized that she should come out of this marriage

to prove her real identity. It took years to come out of this marriage and ultimately got relieved from the so-called zoo.

Again, Swati went in quest for her lost identity. She was searching for the best project work so that she can again acquire her identity, name, fame and of course money. She was trying for a hot new look for herself and to her luck she received a brilliant offer from Hong – Kong based company. Swati was sure that it would definitely be a big deal and determined to work for it if she would grab the offer. The offer was interesting, as Swati was supposed to produce a serial on contemporary subject dealing with women especially Indian. Swati was impressed when she received the offer and decided to work on it. The script writer, a British, had requested Swati to conduct a research on it, as the topic was beyond his understanding as Swati was an Indian after all and nobody could do the better job than her. It was a big challenge for Swati to prove her worth yet again and get back her identity. Therefore, Swati took it as a challenge that she could write, direct and produce TV serial on 'the existing world of the Nineties Indian urban woman. However, for the purpose, Swati did not have more connections with the entertainment industry in India. So, Swati had a brilliant idea over the offer and planned to meet her old school friends and planned to have a research into their lives by recording their strange experiences using a tape. Keeping this in mind, Swati had called Reema and informed that she was coming to India and gave her an idea that their old gang of school friends can unite after a long gap of fifteen years and enjoy their union at Reema's house for lunch on Tuesday. Reema agreed as the idea sounds to be a surprise for every one as they would get the opportunity to be together after a long gap. So Reema, on behalf of Swati invited Rashmi, Aparna, Surekha, and Noor to attend the lunch. All the friends came together and united at Reema's residence.

Swati had already asked Reema to inform the friends to come with their old school photographs and with their old memories, so that everybody can come and share their sweet bitter past experiences and can have snapshots. When, everybody met each other, they were surprised by the changes that had occurred in their personal and professional lives and each one of them shared their past memories. Swati provoked them to share every secret hidden in their hearts. Some memories were good, some bitter and other were shockingly horrible. During this period, Swati was at her mission recording their experiences orally through a tape. Later when chaos was created through their conversations each one started blaming each other for their bitter experiences, they all begin to quarrel and at that time one of Swati's friend noticed some wire connections on the ground as Swati had connected to the tape to record their talk and thus caught Swati behind her hidden mission and the purpose of her visit to India. Everybody were shocked to know that their personal experiences were recorded in a tape by Swati and were filled with anger. They were worried that those past memories can have adverse effect on their present lives and, for some, it can also crack their marriages. Afraid of this they tried to stop Swati from moving out. But Swati outsmarted them, and moved away from Reema's house happily capturing every detail of their lives in the tapes. Swati had triumphed in her mission by having a successful research on Indian urban women and moreover on her own friends. She boasted herself that no other research assistants from London could have done better job than her with her successful

mission. Swati gained back her identity by completing the tough task given to her and was ready to direct this documentary and make it a successful one.

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