



## SWATI, THE SURPANAKA - THE MONSTROUS FEMININE OF SHOBHA DE'S *SNAPSHOTS*

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### ABSTRACT

*The contemporary feminist writers challenging the gender stereotypes attempt to create grotesque female characters defying the norms of female beauty. The she-monsters are common in literature and they have to be looked at in terms of sex and gender. Though they are categorized as females, they are gendered more as masculine than feminine. In this way they transgress the boundaries of the gender and evade the social norms. By coining the term "Monstrous-Feminine", Barbara Creed explores the importance of gender in the construct of woman's monstrosity. She scrutinizes the horror films to conceptualize the notion of "Monstrous-Feminine" and investigates Julia Kristeva's theory of "Abjection" as a way of separating the human from the non-human form. "Abjection" literally means "the state of being cast off." This paper examines the role of Surpanaka in the epic Ramayana, and the reflection of this prototype, Swati in Shobha De's Snapshots, to present them as "Monstrous-Feminine".*

### INTRODUCTION

Women characters in literature are getting changed immensely, especially in recent times because of the impact of feminist movement. Feminist writers like Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson and Fay Weldon -- to name a few -- have challenged gender roles and female stereotypes by depicting their female characters as monstrous and grotesque, thereby defying male norms of female beauty and identity. In the Indian scenario, Shobha De is one such novelist who explores the dark depths of her women characters, successfully portrays their gross appetites and presents them as bizarre personalities. Swati, the major women character in her very different novel *Snapshots*, represents this type and can be dubbed as a 'Monster' like the prototype Surpanaka of the epic the *Ramayana*.

The monster women are nothing new in literature; many different authors have used them in their fiction throughout the centuries, along with the gentle women characters. Hélène Cixous discusses the binary opposition of the monstrous woman and that of an angel. The angel stands for ladylike virtues like beauty, passivity and courtesy. It forms a real contrast to the monster who is often ugly and huge, active and even aggressive in some cases. The she-



monsters must be seen from the aspect of sex and gender. Though they are categorized /sexed as females, they are gendered more as masculine than feminine. In this way they transgress the boundaries of the gender and evade the social norms. Another deviation from the norms is the size of the she-monsters which is unusually and grotesquely large. This property makes them both fascinating and horrifying, in many cases leading to their being lonely and repulsive. Another means of crossing the boundaries of the norms of the female monsters is their sexuality. By having affairs with women they are sexually transgressive and threatening, more threatening due to their procreative powers. The monstrosity of women is often characterized by being evil and the women associated with the evil, which can be traced back as far as the Old Testament. As Andrew Lawless states: "Of course there is a strong tradition of associating female sexuality with sin and evil. One only needs to look to the book of Genesis and the story of Adam and Eve to realise this" (Lawless 1). Alletta Brenner in "The Good and Bad of that Sexe: Monstrosity and Womanhood in Early Modern England" (*Intersections* 10.2, 2009) confirms: "The locating of difference within women's bodies is a tradition that goes back to the oldest of Christian mythologies, Adam and Eve. However, throughout the early modern period, there was a profound surge in the idea that women were somehow monstrous creatures—at best gossiping, unreliable, dishonest and dangerous, and at worst literal corruptions of the human flesh" (Brenner 164). Thus, Eve and the apple represent the lure, the temptation and the evil that cannot be easily resisted. Jeffrey Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996) writes:

The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (both ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster only exists to be read... Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again. (4)

The word itself "monster" comes from the Greek root word "teras" meaning, both horrible and wonderful, and can be followed back in time as far as Adam and Eve or the Ancient Greek mythology. Medusa, one of the gorgons, was a monstrous being, turned the onlookers to stone and was beheaded by Perseus. She is also referred to as a being with great wisdom and intelligence, a woman who possessed female wisdom. Since intelligence is often connected with evil her wisdom along with her natural force, her creative powers, powers of destruction and regeneration were seen as pure evil. Abnormal looks and power made a woman into a monster. (Öhlund 1). These powers of Medusa are seen as a great evil and as a threat, especially when accompanying the woman, the case of Adam and Eve being the first in literature. Maybe it was this kind of power that Hélène Cixous had in mind when she was writing her famous essay "The Laugh of the Medusa." When she wrote about liberating the womankind, she said: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (*Feminisms* 255). She probably thought that

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the great wisdom of Medusa might be a step towards liberation of the women to achieve greater power through her wisdom and intelligence. Such disguised females can be found in the modern times as well, as Shobha De's depiction of Swati, though not in weird physical appearance. Christianity has produced the model of femininity that is sinful and evil, the medieval legends of St. George being the example to be found on the British Isles. Even before this, in *Beowulf* there appears the monstrous feminine. In the nineteenth century, Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can be cited as the examples of literature, where she-monsters appear. Whether they are bound to monstrosity by their size, hybrid appearance, active role which brings them closer to men rather than women or by their sexual and maternal role, they move throughout literature of many periods. In India, the many *puranas* project different she-monsters, the most popular depiction is Surpanaka in the *Ramayana*, a typical representation of Female Monstrosity.

The notion of "Monstrous Feminine", is coined by the feminist theorist Barbara Creed (b 1943), Professor of Cinema Studies in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. In her book *The Monstrous-Feminine : Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), she explores the importance of gender in the construct of woman's monstrosity. "Modern cultural phenomena such as the obsession with physical appearance and its relation to the idealized view of women, as well as the notion of IVF and the creation of life outside the body -- all challenge the traditional roles women play. The Monstrous Feminine critically examines the value society places on vanity, consumerism and the pursuit of perfection and eternal youth. Historically women's sexuality has often been portrayed as something scary, uncomfortable and threatening. There is enormous cultural fear surrounding the idea of ageing and as such there is an entire generation of women whose identities are being shaped by this. This work holds a mirror to the rituals and processes women engage with in response to these paradigms" comments Jessica Ledwich, a visual artist of Melbourne ([www.jessicaledwich.com/about.html](http://www.jessicaledwich.com/about.html)). Barbara Creed scrutinizes the horror films to conceptualize the notion of "Monstrous-Feminine" and explores Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection as a way of separating the human from the non-human form. "Abjection" literally means "the state of being cast off." In common usage, it implies degradation, baseness and meanness of spirit. Post- Structuralism explores the term as that which inherently disturbs conventional identity and cultural concepts. Among the most popular interpretations of abjection is Julia Kristeva's work *Powers of Horror* (1980) describes the subjective horror and therefore one's body that experiences when one is confronted with what she terms one's "corporeal reality", or a break- down in the distinction between what is self and what is other. According to Kristeva, the abject marks a "primal order"; the term is used to refer to the human reaction like horror or vomit, to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object. It is that which cannot be assimilated, always within us, forcing an eternal repetition of repulsing and expelling that is doomed to fail. Kristeva attempts to articulate an explanation of the abject in her seminal text, *Powers of Horror*. The abject is constantly shifting and different for

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everyone, but Kristeva asserts that without it, we would have no way to understand ourselves as fully formed subjects (Kristeva 4). The abject is something so vile that I do not recognize it as a thing (Kristeva 2); I must violently reject it in order to assert myself as 'I', and 'Not that'. It is important to understand the abject, since it can help us to understand why we regard some things as disgusting and repulsive. The analysis can be a useful tool for feminist theories of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Representations of the Monstrous-Feminine, as conceptualized by Barbara Creed, illustrate the ways in which femininity is feared and abjected in contemporary society. The positioning of women's bodies as abject has important implications for women's lived experience. Thus, it is useful and necessary for feminists to understand the concepts of abjection and the monstrous-feminine, as well as how they intersect and relate to one another. Creed has traced a direct connection between the monstrous woman and Kristeva's concept of the abject, noting that, "all human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (Creed 1). Creed discusses depictions of the Monstrous-Feminine in horror film. Her analysis goes far deeper than simply looking at monsters in movies though; she is concerned with the importance of gender in these representations. Creed carefully explains that she has used "term 'monstrous-feminine' [because] the term 'female monster' implies a simple reversal of 'male monster'. The reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience . . . The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity" (3). For Creed, it is the femininity itself that is monstrous.

Abjection is a difficult concept to come to terms with. Kristeva is concerned with the vital role of the abject in forming the subject. Abjection allows one to separate himself / herself from what he / she is not. Kristeva contends that a person cannot exist without using the abject to draw a border. The abject is what must be repulsed because it cannot be assimilated (Kristeva 3). The necessity of this repulsion is described thus: "we may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger" (Kristeva 9). Abject must be expelled, but it must be recognized that it is always ready within a person. One cannot approach the repugnant abject, yet he / she cannot be without it; it is the border that defines the person. The abject is not one thing, however, Kristeva asserts that there are some relatively universal forms of abjection, the foremost being the corpse. "The potential corpse resides within me at all times – it is me, but the rejection of that notion is what defines me as living. . . . refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live . . . There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border" (3). "I am forced to recognize my own mortality, yet unable to do so at the same time, thus, I must repel it, reject it, abject it" (Kristeva 13). Kristeva's concept of abjection effectively explains popular cultural narratives of horror and misogyny, and builds on the traditional psychoanalytic



theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Drawing on the French tradition of interest in the monstrous Kristeva develops the idea of the abject as that which disturbs social reason – the communal consensus that underpins a social order. The "abject" exists somewhere between the concept of an object and the subject, representing taboo elements of the self barely separated off in a liminal space. Kristeva claims that within the boundaries of what one defines as subject – a part of oneself, and object – something that exists independently of oneself – there resides pieces that were once categorized as a part of oneself or one's identity that has since been rejected – the abject. Kristeva has created a distinction in the true meaning of abjection: it is not the lack of "cleanliness or health" that causes abjection, but that which disturbs identity, system, and order. It is an inherently traumatic experience, as with the repulsion presented by confrontation with filth, waste, or a corpse – an object which is violently cast out of the cultural world, having once been a subject. Thus, the sense of the abject complements the existence of the superego – the representative of culture. In Kristeva's aphorism, "To each ego its object, to each superego its abject" (2). The "Monstrous-Feminine", then, is the "Abject", represented as artifacts of different forms in paintings, images, horrific figures in films, characters in literary works such as Surpanaka of the *Ramayana* and Swati of De's *Snapshots*.

Indians, in general, seem to know well the plot of the *Ramayana* as presented by the poet Valmiki. The *Ramayana* is a South Asian epic tradition found in a multiplicity of tellings. The *Ramayana* as told by Valmiki in Sanskrit (circa 2nd c. BCE – 2nd c. CE) is the most extensive early literary telling of the life of Rama, and it is this version that is widely regarded as the "original" *Ramayana*. Surpanaka is an indispensable character in the epic, as she is the one responsible for the abduction of Sita, Rama's spouse by Ravana, the King of Lanka and her brother, and for the subsequent war between Rama and Ravana leading to the latter's death. Ravana, the king of Lanka, is also the Lord of the Rakshasas or demons. Surpanaka lived in the forest, a free woman. One day, she happened to see Rama. Smitten by his beauty, she asked him to take her as his wife. But he had his wife Sita and so directed her to his younger brother, Laxman, who was all alone. Laxman spurned her advances because all he wanted was to serve his brother and his sister-in-law. Angry at being rejected by both men, Surpanaka attacked Rama's young wife Sita, but Laxman blocked her path and dragged her by the hair, and then to teach her a lesson she would never forget, pulled out his sword and cut her nose. Surpanaka ran to her brother screaming. An angry Ravana abducted Sita and had her imprisoned in his island-kingdom. Rama then raised an army of monkeys, launched an attack on Lanka determined to kill the Rakshasa-king to rescue his wife. This is the common story available in almost all the re-tellings of the *Ramayana*.

But, Surpanaka has a biography of her own says Devdutt Pattanaik in his most recent version of the *Ramayana*, *Sita - An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*, published by the Penguin Books in 2013. The blurb says that "Devdutt Pattanaik is a medical doctor by education, a leadership consultant by profession and a mythologist by passion". To write his book,

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Pattanaik draws attention to the many oral, visual and written retellings composed in different times, in different places, by different poets. He also adds a commentary to each of the chapters, pointing out the differences in the re-tellings. Surpanaka's story is narrated in two chapters, "Surpanakha's Husband and Son", and "Disfiguring Surpanakha" (123-127). 'Surpanaka' means one whose nails are as long as the winnow. Surpanaka's husband was Vidyutjiva, meaning 'lightning tongue', a demon-sorcerer, and her son, Sunkumar, a demon-ascetic. Pattanaik says that this story comes from Tamil folklore and his narration records that once the angry Vidyutjiva, goaded by his wife stretched out his enormous tongue and swallowed Ravana, when Mandodari, Ravana's wife and Surpanaka were involved in a domestic altercation. The only way to save Ravana was to cut open the stomach of the man who had swallowed him. Ravana promised her that he would make her son his heir and that she could choose anyone as her husband. Surpanaka, then, with her claw-like nails tore open her husband's belly and liberated her brother. But, Ravana did not keep his promise. The impatient son decided to perform tapasya to acquire a weapon to kill Ravana, when he was accidentally killed by Laxman. The furious Surpanaka tracked the footsteps of Laxman, and in Panchavati saw the handsome Rama and Laxman, who looked like sages. First she approached Rama and asked him to satisfy her desire. The bemused Rama told her that he was married, directed her to approach Laxman, who also rejected her. The irritated Surpanaka saw Sita seated beside Ram, understood that she was the rival and so had to be exterminated. She began to attack Sita, when Laxman caught her by the hair and pulled her back. The strong Surpanaka shoved him away. Sita requested him not to kill her, but the enraged Laxman wanted to teach her a lesson she would never forget, grabbed a knife and chopped off her nose. Yelling aloud, Surpanaka ran in search of her brothers, Khara and Dhushana.

Two comments of Pattanaik must be mentioned that seem to underline the concept of "Monstrous-Feminine". He says: "In the Valmiki *Ramayana*, Surpanakha is foul and ugly and demonic. In the Kamban *Ramayana*, she is lovelorn and beautiful. Versions vary about how she looks. In Ram-leela plays of the Gangetic plains, she is comical in her vulgar display of erotic desire. The story makes it explicit the conflict between natural desire and social values" (126). Pattanaik's another comment seems to be more metaphorical and symbolic that readily relates itself to Barbara Creed's definition of "Abject" when interpreted. He states: "The most common version of the tale refers to Surpanakha's nose being cut off. But often the cutting of the nose is accompanied by the chopping of her ears. And in the most brutal version, found in Kamban's Tamil *Ramayana*, there is even reference to her breasts being cut off. In South Indian folklore, the breasts are where a woman's power resides" (126). Needless to say that women's breasts indicate the mother-aspect of women. In her theorising the "Abject", Julia Kristeva contends that the process of becoming a subject inherently requires breaking away from one's mother. This is an important observation that requires deeper investigation. Another significant observation is from Karlene McLain in her article for the magazine *Manushi* (32), "Sita and Shrupanakha -- Symbols of the Nation in the



*Amar Chithra Katha* comic Book Ramayana", wherein she confirms that the *Ramayana* is a text that demonizes the "other." She remarks: "Shrupanakha was mutilated not for her attack on Sita, but for her sexual assertiveness. But Shrupanakha does not suffer this humiliation just because she has been sexually assertive – her status as the "other", also figures in her disfiguration. In communal struggles the humiliation of the "other" woman plays a crucial role". McLain's "other" is the "Abject" or "Monstrous-Feminine" that must be rejected.

Surpanaka, the prototype "Monstrous-Feminine" gets representation as a vamp or *femme fatale* or female-monster or she-devil in creative works. One such modern hi-tech depiction is Swati in *Snapshots*, who comes down from London to make successful her novel project. J.P. Tripathi rightly comments in his "Shobha De's Snapshots -- The Overwhelming Question" : "Shobha De has presented most of the women as lambs growing into wolves when illtreated by men. But Swati is a verutable 'tiger' who can 'screw' any man and all men and she can lick her women friends working as wolves" (*Indian Fiction of the Nineties* 157). *Snapshots* centres around the reunion of six married career women several years later in life. The get-together of the friends is arranged at the behest of Swati from London to India on a brief holiday. She has requested her friends over the phone to assemble at a lunch at Reema's house and also bring snapshots of their schooldays. Swati, in reality has planned to do a serial on a contemporary subject dealing with Indian women. She is determined, at any rate to do the serial, "Sisters of the Subcontinent" to complete the assignment from Hongkong which would bring her money and fame. Her intention, obviously, is not the "get-together" , and of satisfying not only the business motive but also the vendetta she carries in her mind. De writes:

*With the right kind of inputs, she could put a proposal together -- she could write, direct and produce a bold, meaty series on the exciting world of the Nineties Indian urban woman. She was shrewd enough to realize that this break would take her a long, long way -- if she played it right. But to make it happen, she needed voices -- authentic voices, familiar voices, confused voices. Voices that would ring true. She also knew it was difficult to conduct cold blooded research into a subject like this. (306)*

In order to make her project successful, she cheats her old girl friends, invites them by sending flowers for the lunch party at Reema's residence. She plants with 'buggers' in her house to record the voices. They meet and share their memories, experiences, dark secrets and sexual exploits. Some memories are happy, some bitter-sweet and other poisonous -- all come to surface and get recorded.

Swati, the *femme fatale* and the organizer of this vicarious show, "is a 'classy' whore" (Tripathi 159), now, is Swati Bridges, the divorcee of an Englishman. Her father is a Keralite and her mother is half-Assamese and half-Bengali. Bridges is a football team captain and



considers Swati a sex maniac. It is difficult to categorize her physically, her unusual looks captivates everybody. She has inherited her nutmeg complexion from her Malayali father and rather exotic features with tip-tilted oriental eyes from her mother. Swati has always been inconstant, confident, sexy, flirtatious, financially and socially more powerful, also a singer and manipulative from her School days. She exercises control over others, socially tactful and competent and submits an honest expression, so that none has any misgiving in her behavior. Her spontaneity tends to resolve suspicion, which makes easier for her to get away with her lies. She presents herself effectively in front of others. As a girl, she was an embodiment of jealousy and had her own reason to be so against each one of her friends. Her chief rival was Aparna who was declared as the best student of the year much against Swati's expectation. Swati carries this vengeance in her mind for years, and sees to it that she takes away Rohit, Aparna's husband to revenge the old defeat. Rashmi was declared the best 'all-rounder', that was unbearable to Swati. She staged some love-scenes in a play, where she lashed and whipped Rashmi wounding her, and thus satisfied her revenge. She was spiteful of Reema because she used to get better grades and so was dear to the teacher. She had also bagged the lead role in the annual school-play. Swati, a shrewd and domineering figure turned Reema's helplessness to her advantage. But, by helping Reema in the hour of her desperate condition, Swati obliged her for a whole life time. However, her hidden jealousy made her reveal the secret of Reema to her parents by informing through an anonymous bad written letter in her own handwriting. Due to which Reema had to marry Ravi a man not of her choice. Swati liked Noor, a harmless, sweet girl in the class. She enslaved Noor, lowered her dignity impelling her to commit suicide. Noor's fault was that she revealed Swati's secret of tapping through electronic bugs placed secretly in the room. Swati developed an imperious attitude towards Noor after subjugating her brother Nawaz in illicit unprincipled sexual relationship with him just to win Nawaz from Noor. She exulted under the idea that she was far superior to all women. She desired more and more nearly the complete entirety that attracted her. The fear of exposure of incestuous relationship with her brother led Noor to feel ashamed and jeopardise all over her life, and she committed suicide by closing herself in the bathroom. Swati's fuming jealousy did not leave Dolly, who was used during the schooldays to devastate the rival Green House efforts by spying on their practices. Her scheme was found out and the school suspended her. Dolly remained deprived and reckless throughout her life due to her physical and intellectual degradation by Swati. Just like Noor, because of getting exposed, she also committed suicide. Swati is unscrupulous and excessively prone towards personal egotism. Her dishonest demeanor abhors Surekha for the simple reason that she helped Dolly in her ignominious situations, thereby hurting her ego boundlessly.

Swati's greediness is limitless, her desire immeasurable and her world is enshrined within money and materials. She extends its horizon through low and mean measures, readily sacrificing her conscience and ethical feelings. When she gets an overseas confirmation to do a serial, she plans to come back to India and misuse her friendship by inviting her friends for

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a reunion. Now, her old jealousy springs from her psyche with a greater vigour. She can be well-described as the *femme fatale*, an archetype of literature, today often described as having a power akin to an enchantress, seductress, vampire, witch, or demon -- the "Monstrous-Feminine" *Femme fatale* in the American slang is "vamp", short of the term "vampire". J.P. Tripathi remarks: " Besides being a nympho, Swati is sadistic . . . Aparna wanted to get away but the magnetism of Swati attracts her. "And those eyes -- those awful, terrible, beautiful, hypnotic Swati-eyes that could make you, force you, to do whatever she wanted you to, without your even knowing it". Aparna is fascinated and revolted by Swati's glance over her and others" (161-62). The novelist seems keen to project the idea that the women's psyche forces the strength of power, if needs be, on both the men and women alike in order to create its own world. This is a kind of psychic dislocation in certain women who are also representations of patriarchy. In the article, "Fallacious Friendship in Shobha De's Novel: *Snapshots*" (*IOSR-JHSS* Vol.19.1, Jan.2014), Siddqui Jabeen Rafiuddin comments on the psychic aberration of Swati. She states:

*Swati's pursuit for success is relentless. She emerges as a winner from the fifth standard in exams, competitions and plays. She goes to London and joins the School of Drama but she becomes a case of high determination and was unsuccessful. She was the child, neglected by her parents. . . . Swati lacks the parental love, care, tenderness and honour in her childhood and was accustomed to different ayahs to take care of her. . . . In the absence of affection and sympathy in her childhood she develops with [sic] a malicious and criminal mind and was unable to justify her own deeds. She felt alone without her parents. She absorbs the environment and the company of different ayahs. She interacted with the bad environment from a very early age and when grown-up adopted their addictions like booze and sex, abuses and mental conditions of the ayahs. . . . Her nature becomes flippant which adulterated her life, mind and body and degraded her to complete zero. Her dark aspect of human nature makes her to take revenge of her friends. . . . Swati might have felt that she has been hurt in some way by her parents or by life situations. She felt that the only way for her to gain significance is to avenge it on others resulting in fallacious friendship. Lack of parental love results a feeling of insecurity, low self warmth and potentially difficulty in maintaining interpersonal relationships. (60)*

This remark of Siddiqui can be referred to Kristeva's explication of the "Abject" that the process of becoming a subject inherently requires breaking away from one's mother. "The abject confronts us . . . with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity . . . It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (Kristeva 13). There is always that connection to (and fear of) the mother's body; abjection preserves it. Swati's dark aspect, perhaps, may be due to this abjection.



Donald Woods Winnicott (1896 – 1971) was an English paediatrician, especially influential in the field of object relations theory. He is best known for his ideas on the true self and false self, and the transitional object. He views that Self-development depends on the emergence of differentiation of 'me' from 'not me,' and the experience of the infant's own feelings and perceptions as distinct from those of others. The infant-mother relationship has three functions that facilitate this: holding-integration, handling-personalization, and object-relating (Winnicott, 1965). Maternal holding is based on comprehension, holding in mind, of the infant's mental state. Winnicott suggested that optimal development of self-esteem depends on the mother's capacity for affective 'mirroring' of the infant. For Winnicott, the *True Self* is a sense of being alive and real in one's mind and body, having feelings that are spontaneous and unforced. This experience of aliveness is what allows people to be genuinely close to others, and to be creative. He views that only the true self can be creative and only the true self can feel real. The "True Self" begins to develop in infancy, in the relationship between the baby and its primary caretaker, namely, "the mother". One of the ways the mother helps the baby develop an authentic self is by responding in a welcoming and reassuring way to the baby's spontaneous feelings, expressions, and initiatives. The "False Self" is a defence, a kind of mask of behaviour that complies with others' expectations. More extreme kind of False Self begins to develop in infancy, as a defence against an unsafe environment because of a lack of reasonably attuned care-giving. In an adult, the False Self of a person gets manifested in circumstances that demand defence from him/her. Winnicott's views explain Swati's behaviour as an adolescent/adult, and how it promotes the "Monstrous-Feminine" in her. Her self-efficaciousness is undeniable. But, it is the outcome of her False Self, and so it leads to unwanted, unexpected negative results. In a person who nurtures negative thoughts and ill-feelings, even if he/she possesses high self-efficacy, it fosters anxiety, stress, depression, and a narrow vision, as seen in the case of Swati. Swati with her monstrous acts conducts herself in moral disengagement without minding the pain of others. Awareness dawns in her at last with the death of Noor, when Aparna hurls sharp words at her. Shobha De's brief portrayal of the literal fight between Rashmi and Swati shows the monster in Swati: "Rashmi went for her blindly, hitting out , grabbing fistful of Swati's lustrous hair. The two women went crashing into Reema's glass and chrome coffee table . . . Rashmi screamed as Swati started to slide out from under her, all pounding fists and dagger-like nails" (*Snapshots* 304) -- a real Surpanaka-fight indeed! Swati's haphazard way of life makes her a *femme fatale*, a Monstrous-Feminine. As Urbashi Barat observes, "Swati, apparently, is no victim but a survivor. . . . the "vamp," that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have used to describe certain women writers and critics, who represents the "rebelliously . . . anti- hierarchical impulses that have been repressed but not erased by patriarchal culture . . . the drama of seduction and betrayal that she enacts in her foray against patriarchal structures may end up being as seductively treacherous to women as to men." (248). Shobha De has obviously decided to portray Swati as Surpanaka, the "Monstrous-Feminine".



In *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body*, Jane Ussher discusses this need for ritual purification in dealing with the abject. She claims that, “film and art . . . offer the potential for inoculation against the danger and polluting power of the fecund body. Indeed, Julia Kristeva has argued that as societies become more secular, art has taken over from religion as a force of purification and catharsis” (Ussher 2). Here, the fecund body is the monstrous-female body, which is the abject mother. Tracing representations of women’s bodies through art history, Ussher helps to uncover the ways in which we struggle to come to terms with the abject feminine body.

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