

## **AFAF (EFFAT) JAMIL KHOGEER REVIEWS SHEKHER SRIVASTAVA'S *YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL O' WOMAN: 7 VIRTUES OF A WOMAN***

Shekher Srivastava praises women and extols their attributes in his latest novel, *You are Beautiful O'Woman: 7 Virtues of a Woman*. Through the narrator, Arvind, readers can actively follow him in his journey towards discovering women's seven virtues. Although Srivastava is not identified as a feminist writer, his novel has feminist literary characteristics. What unites feminists is the overarching assertion that most cultures are basically patriarchal existing in male-dominated societies. They reveal that most work of men authors contains stereotypical images of women who are portrayed as being passive, unintelligent, and physically and emotionally weak. Feminist authors have countered this practice by writing about strong female characters who are empowered and are intellectually, emotionally, and physically strong. Although he is a man, like these female authors, Srivastava extols the positive qualities of women and deconstructs the binary oppositions often found in novels in which men are portrayed as being powerful and the women as being weak and submissive.

Srivastava opens the novel with Arvind sitting in the maternity ward of the hospital in Delhi awaiting the arrival of his first born child. His wife, Jayanti, is his childhood sweetheart who epitomizes the perfect woman. He is so enamored of his wife that he hopes that the baby is a girl, and asks God to "Bless her as your most artful creation. Oh! Unbearingly, I let out my wish to have a baby girl. (Srivastava 10). Srivastava uses the technique of flashbacks to present a story within a story. Arvind has flashbacks that lead him to a discovery of the seven virtues

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of a woman. The first flashback is a depiction of his childhood crush on Jayanti when they were students at the St. Ignatius Convent Missionary co-ed school. Srivastava showcases his talent for writing poetry and intersperses poems throughout the narrative. He writes a poem with simple words to show Arvind's love for Jayanti, "She's so simple and so nice/Sweet and softly polite/She's as fizzy and full of life" (15).

The juxtaposition of poetry and narrative text gives the novel unity. The meaning of each scene and the characters' significance to the main plot are in unity. In their book, *Understanding Poetry*, Brooks and Warren, explain how this unity is accomplished:

*[The poet] cannot assemble [the parts of the poem] in a merely arbitrary fashion; they must bear some relation to each other. So he develops his sense of the whole, the anticipation of the finished poem.... Then, as the sense of the whole develops, it modifies the process by which the poet selects and relates the parts, the words, images, rhythms.... [I]t is an infinitely complicated process of establishing interrelations. (526-7)*

During the flashback about his love for Jayanti, Arvind extols the virtues of his mother who is compassionate and self-serving. She is compared to Eve who is the mother of all humans. In his depiction of women, and mothers in particular, Srivastava shows them having complementary responsibilities with men and not competing ones. They are different but not unequal. His message is that childcare, and maintenance of the home is an equal obligation.

The major portion of the novel is told in a flashback that takes Arvind into the metaphysical world. He started on this journey after graduating from the school of Architecture. He was

travelling on a plane to London for a job when he went into a trance. During the trance, he attends the Inter-Universe Creators Conference conducted by God who engages him and other attendees in a discourse on the Seven Vices and Seven Virtues. Srivastava uses images and references to nature to describe the qualities of women and their virtues. He writes that humans are composed of five elements: fire, earth, air, water, and sky, and asserts that women balance nature: “woman balances the forces and brings equilibrium.” Her wisdom will create an environment that transfers the five elements into a “positive rhythm” (46). The revelations from the discourse are an ode to what Srivastava calls Wumanity—which is a thinking, a realization, a connect to the conscience, an internal awakening, an appreciation and a thanksgiving to every woman” (75). Srivastava uses metaphors and similes as he unfolds the seven virtues and describes women: “Her love is like the morning dew” (76); “She is like the lotus that signifies faith in its own self to adapt to its natural surroundings” (77); “A woman is the sun and moon in her house” (138); She is the canvas who makes every man an artist” (168). Srivastava’s skillful use of metaphors and similes enhances the novel and adds depth and powerful imagery that draws readers into the storyline and keeps them entertained.

Srivastava uses the Socratic method as a technique to tell the story of how God revealed the seven virtues of women to Arvind. He has God ask Arvind and the others who are attending the conference conceptual clarification questions, that cause them to think about what things, mean and give examples of concepts. He probes their assumptions and has them consider their presuppositions and unquestioned beliefs about women. In addition, when they provide rationales for their answers, Srivastava has God make them delve into their reasoning and provide support for their assertions. This is done as God reveals and explains women’s seven virtues, beginning with Innocence. God explains that Innocence is what women carry with them when they marry and leave their parents’ home to make a new

one of their own. Forbearance is the second virtue, which is exemplified by her “doing her daily bit for others in the family to prosper” (86). Godliness, the third virtue, gives women their strength that is greater than a man because of her selfless sacrifices. The fourth virtue, Orderliness, causes her to inculcate in man, a harmoniously civilized behavior, which “ensures the continuity of earth” (120). Radiance, the fifth virtue, is the compassion that emanates from her concern for and care of others. The sixth, Vibrance, is the “halo of happiness” that the woman creates every day. The seventh is Yonder, through which women are able to be the barometer that senses a new horizon and change that others will go through.

Srivastava brings readers back to the real world after Arvind has learned the seven virtues and promises to extol them throughout his life. Arvind is reunited with his first love, after not seeing her for eight years. They marry and we are brought back to the beginning of the novel when she is in labor. Srivastava provides us with a happy ever after ending that is really a beginning with the birth of Arvind’s daughter. He names her Vanita, which means the innocent in every home.

Srivastava’s novel is an ode to women that gives them the recognition they have historically yearned for. Although it is not an ode that is not written in the standard, traditional way with many lyrical verses, it still has the elements of praise, honor, and exaltation. His novel contains the literary strategies used in novels that glorify women, and places them in a spiritual context explained in Hall’s work, *The Exalted Heroine and the Triumph of Order: Class, Women, and Religion in the English Novel*. The characteristics of novels that exalt women, which Hall explains, are found in Srivastava’s work. He promotes the idealized archetype of the good woman, and attributes to them the qualities, such as loyalty, unselfishness, kindness, and prowess. They have a moral force that is superior to men’s and a prominent status in society. The moral strength that women

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possess converts the men in their lives from being chauvinistic. As a consequence, she is viewed “meritocratically” and rewarded by being exalted (Hall 139). Indeed, Srivastava has given honor to women and shown their power to replace the seven vices, Intolerance, Betrayal, Greed, Yelling (Anger), Outrageousness, Violence, and Revenge with her seven virtues, Forbearance, Vibrance, Innocence, Godliness, Yonder, Orderliness, and Radiance. In doing this, Srivastava has rejected the stereotypical images of women in literature, and provided a realistic view of them, confirming that they are truly beautiful.

### References

1. Brooks, Cleanth & Warren, Robert Penn. *Understanding Poetry*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960.
2. Hall, K.G. *The Exalted Heroine and the Triumph of Order: Class, Women, and Religion in the English Novel, 1740-1800*. Lanham: Barnes & Noble Books, 1994.
3. Srivastava, Shekher. *You are Beautiful O'Woman: 7 Virtues of a Woman*. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2015.

*You Are Beautiful, O Woman!* by Shekher Srivastava is an inspirational book. The author observes that goodness of "Womankind" continues to foster the right balance in human society through the values she instills. In every culture, it's a must read by men, women and teenagers across the globe, as it gives the right message of respect and dignity every woman deserves.  
—Khurshid Alam, Chief Editor, Contemporary Literary Review India



Shekher Srivastava is a postgraduate in Science and Management. Professionally he is a business strategist and has worked across industry segments as diverse as automobiles, financial services and international assignments.

Shekher is a keen observer and spontaneous writer who has been writing various articles and poems as a hobby. One such poem *The Spirit of a Woman* written in March 2009 on Woman's Day, which won him many accolades, became the perspective for the book. This is his first book. You can share your comment with the author at [shekher.srivastava25@gmail.com](mailto:shekher.srivastava25@gmail.com).



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