

## DISSEMINATING SHOBHA DE'S STARRY NIGHTS THROUGH COGNITIVE BIAS LIMITED TO DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

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### ABSTRACT

*Cognitive bias is a systematic way of framing and analysing information that affects individual's judgement and decisions making process. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky collaborated in devising the concept cognitive bias which is founding stone of behavioural economics. Gaining popularity this concept is studied in the field of psychology, crisis management and future marketing. Cognitive bias in literature is one of the understudied topics. As this article intends to disseminate cognitive bias limited to decision making process, of how protagonist decision making bias affects her life and where by how the Shobha De effectively applies the cognitive bias to attract the audience.*

**Keywords:** *cognitive bias; emotional and cognitive collision; change blindness; anachronism;*

On reading the book "Elements of Surprise: our mental limits and satisfaction of plots by Vera Tobin, intrigued me much into cognitive literary studies, as how the different plots works different with time. This article reveals the least studied concept in literature, when cognitive bias is widely studied in the field of business management, finance and in behavioural economics. In this paper let me bring out few optimal cognitive bias from the novel "Starry Nights" written by Shobha De, which is her second novels. She is a Mumbai socialite, journalist and writer and came to be known as the "Jackie Collins of India". This article also explores cognitive bias in two paradigms of how the characters suffer cognitive bias and how De exploits them in hooking the readers. So what is cognitive bias? In the early 1970s, Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman introduced the term 'cognitive bias' to describe people's systematic but purportedly flawed patterns of responses to judgment and decision problems ever since it has become the popular term in social sciences and psychology. These biases can spellbound us, captivate us to their side, provoke our ego, freeze our brain, touch our conscious, tickle our sweet spots by planting misrepresentation and misinterpretations until we reread, reevaluate, reanalyse and revamp the constructed reality between truth and imaginary world. Most times these settings and programmed writings mark the exaggeration of actuality with first-hand

experience. Many psychologists define cognitive bias is a systematic (that is, non-random and, thus, predictable) deviation from rationality in judgement or decision marking.

A cognitive bias does not result from any emotional bias or intellectual disposition towards making a judgement - rather it is subconscious process and a mental shortcut. It can be compared to mirage, where we know it is a complete error in judgement and decision but we believe in reality. With literature branching into different streams and it is better now; we have to disseminate these literary characters through the eye of cognitive analysis rather from psychological perspectives with complete understanding of cognition as epistemic peroration.

Cognitive functioning of humans Stanovich and West (2000) have clear differentiation between system 1 and system 2 .The primary is intuitive, automatic, effortless, implicit and emotional, while the secondary is reflective, slower, conscious, determined and rational(Kahneman, 2003). On the one hand, the automatic system, or gut feeling, is rapid and is or feels instinctive: when we duck because a ball is thrown at us unexpectedly or we get nervous when our airplane shakes because of turbulence (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Gut feelings can be quite accurate, but people, even executives, often make mistakes because they rely too much on the automatic system (Chung, 2004). On the other hand, the reflective system is more deliberate and self-conscious. We use it when deciding which route to take for a trip, or which course to attend the following semester. Since System 1 is faster than System 2 in making decisions, people have developed thousands of simplifying strategies or rules of thumb, so-called heuristics.

To our surprise renowned cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman admits that his decades of ground-breaking research have failed to significantly improve his own mental performance. "My intuitive thinking is just as prone to overconfidence, extreme predictions, and the planning fallacy"—a tendency to underestimate how long it will take to complete a task—"as it was before I made a study of these issues," he writes. With cognitive bias on the play *Starry Nights* exhibits various heuristic behaviour and faulty decision that drives the character to face all dilemma, disturbance and failure. *Starry Night* is the story of a girl who is forced into movie business and cursed to become a great star, climbing the ladder to the top enduring all sexual encounters, emotional fracture, betrayal and threat only to return to the same with nothing. To her realisation, she was only a tool to make use of her body as weapon to reach the goal, which she deeply reasons to pass on to her daughter. Shobha De clearly unveils the cognitive bias of both her and character to excite the reader. Of more than 171 cognitive biases with 21 decision making bias listed by scientist, I would choose seven optimal biases to examine the characters in *Starry Nights*.

With emotional and cognitive collisional bias blurring the heroine Aasha rani, as the heuristic is defined as the emotional response which is often results in disagreement of the individual after a thoughtful reasoning; where she melts to marry Akshay Arora (married to Malini), the love of her life until he reveals her past to Showbiz magazine as "discarded lover boy seeks revenge, said the caption...Akshay Arora has started "screw Aasha Rani campaign". Aasha rani wants to shun Akshay for revealing her old life to the showbiz magazine. "Her first reflex was to reach the phone and call Akshay cheap, bloody bastard...he probably want her to make this mistake...God ! oh God ...her big romance with Akshay was off as suddenly as it was on". (*Starry nights* 70-71) As the novel moves she

faces conjunction fallacy, as heuristic states the assumption are more specific conditions are the probability than a general ones, the heuristic occurs for they choose alternatives which are the subset of the same. In the scenario, everyone in the showbiz know Akshay as man of questionable moral “spiteful bastard...he told the press on the day to wed her ‘i want a homemaker, someone who will be a good mother to my children. I don’t want to marry a painted doll; some cheap filmy girl who will flirt with all my friends”. (Starry nights 53) Aasha knew the nature of tinsel industry as heroes will always consolidate their career with heroines, as it inescapable circumstances. Spite knowing Aasha rani fancied her love on Akshay, which lead to her suicide attempt. Then the protagonist suffers regression to the mean heuristic as most people tend to ignore the fact extreme events tend to regress towards the mean on following trails. Aasha hates men from her childhood as did her father, she lusts to lead a normal life. She have lost the power of deciding on her own(as Amma and Kishanbhai does) she falls into every soul to seek redemption and peace, but that was not easy as she is cobwebbed and trapped into numerous affairs. She does not have courage to come out of it rather she possessed endurance to take through it. Firstly, kishanbhai was her exploiter, he loved her and pimped her out for potential ventures, then Akshay arora whom she loved and decided to leave her career to marry him, when he only needed a physical relationship, after frustration she finds solace with shethji while he sodomizes for his sexual gratification by inserting diaphragm into her and later opens his gate to Dubai. Fleeting Aasha rani assimilates to Suhas only to find out, he is impotent and leaves him. Later she affiliates with Abhijit he tortures her sexually marrying his girlfriend Nikita. Later she meets Ramesh a virtuous lover, who strokes her only make skin tingle. In the flight toilet she makes out with Gopala Krishnan and finally mets up Jamie's phillips where she marries him and bears a child Sasha, Jay also cheats on her by having an affair with Alice, Sasha baby sitter.

Then she suffers for change blindness as individuals fail to notice the change in the visual environment. Aasha constantly moves from place to place during every emotional break up to get rid of memories cast upon her, as most of them romantic. She shuttles between Bombay and Madras, then to Dubai, News Zealand and London. Wherever she goes her fate is the same “I can never relax in Bombay, never speak my heart to no one, nobody cares...Aasha rani detested the monsoon it was one time of the year she felt completely to abandon the city....she stares out of the windows as a can has rolled through the desert streets of London, “Dad wants you to stay here as long as you want. He has left instructions that all your bills be settled. He has also left you money for shopping and travelling (Auckland). (Starry nights 112... et al).On the sixth day of shopping she meets Jay, whom she marries and bears a child Sasha. The heroine then lacks the focalism as the individuals tend to focus too much on a particular event and too little on other events that are just as likely to occur. When she goes to meet Sudha at her bungalow after her nasty interview with showbiz saying “I am a star and she is no body”, even after Jay and Sasha came to India, she was focusing to keep her presence a secret and away from cinema industry especially from Showbiz magazine and Linda.She avoided Kishanbhai and Amma, while they planning for a big party to celebrate her comeback, she failed to watch that Amma was pimping her sister Sudha to her son-in-law as “when amma saw Jay, she phoned me the same night and said, He’s very good looking. Why don't you make friends with him? call him to your house...he even suggested that he route his flight back to New Zealand through Bombay “ It is clear that Aasha Rani had too much to think and lots to worry about as she reached Bombay from News Zealand. She wobbled between self and others to

strike a balance. Later when she met her Appa, Aasha rani had to deal with anachronism, a bias explained to be individuals make estimates for the value upon initial value based upon the previous experiences or random assignment or whatever information is available - and typically make insufficient adjustments from that anchor when establishing a final value. She remembered father as heartless and lustful man, who exploited her mother when he lost interest in her mother, he cuts of all money so that they have to move some filthy little place to make their survival. Her mother Geetha devi also will also make her mysterious mission with dubious mamas only to return home late sleepy selling herself to provide livelihood to Aasha and Sudha. From the moment Viji (Aasha) had developed hatred towards men, for how her father ill-treated her mother. Even after she become top-rated movie star, she did not meet her father in hospital for she hated Appa for cruel he was to have showered pain on them. After years of distress Viji return backs to Chennai where she meets with father with her husband and daughter Sasha. As her father confessed "there are things I have to tell you. Things I should told you years ago...i wanted to see you, touch you, tell you sorry I was for whatever had happened. I had done you great harm behaved unforgivably. Cruelly....Money-hah! I'd worshipped it till the day. My dream died- Viji my dream died-went up in flames....but after seeing you my hopes have been reborn". (Starry nights 308).

In the last paragraph his father reveals his master plan as He is bankrupt, the studio is closed, and all the moveable assets are sold. But the name and the premises are transferred to Aasha Rani. She has to promise him that she will revive the family banner and re-open the studio, the only legacy he leaves for her. When she consents to his proposal, appa nods and shuts his eyes, having contentment on his face. Yet at the last the Aasha rani maintains the status quo bias, all through the novel, it must be easy for her to get out such humiliating and tormenting life at any point of the time, which she never does; but endures to sail towards the horizon with hope and no destination. From early days of blue films "amma had taken her aside to the bathroom and pinched her arm savagely. Don't be stupid, these films will not be shown in theatres" (Starry nights 67) even when developed a sense of misandry towards men. she often bitterly said to Kishanbhai " all of you are just the same, but wait, I will show you, what you men do to me, i will do to you, I will beat you in your own game" spite she has lesbian relationship with Linda, as in Dubai with the Thai girls "she had experienced some of the greatest orgasms of her life"( Starry Nights 112). "Yes, she thought, this is what it should be, tender, beautiful and erotic. In a way it could never be with a man" (Starry Nights 137). Even after she finds out her husband had affair with her sister and nanny "do you have a little faith on me? Do you think I'm such a low heel that I would cheat on you with your own sister...sasa cried no he can't .he won't. He likes the nanny. He told me so. They are together all the time and I'm alone (247-248). When she heard the news of Akshay's death smiled bitterly. "What had been in his life-- a woman without status? A woman without a status. A shadowy nobody. How silly she was being, she thought to herself" (252) even after Jojo's wife sent her salaam threatening her life "stay away from Jojo or next time I'll spread open your legs and slash your vagina'. She even made up her mind to meet her sister Sudha in hospital "it is that we have to go. Show your face to me Sudha, my dear, little Sudha let me look at you'. Aasha rani bent over her sister and carefully pried away her stiff fingers" later at the end of the novel Sasha had the makings of the star. An unforgettable star. The golden girl of the silver screen! Ningthoujam in her article, "Traditional woman versus modern women: A study of Shobha De's Novels" explores the glamour world saying: It is not only Aasha Rani but a good number of other heroines who

have made a place for themselves using their body as the main bait to get what they aspire for. Women in the glamour world are, in traditional parlance, characterless with no consideration for traditional morality which, in fact, is called into question. Knowing well this fact, the new generation of ambitious women is ready to make every compromise as long as they can get riches and fame. (Image of the New Woman in the Novels of Shobha De, 43) Of all these occasion states of affairs she maintained her status quo bias as she believed it to be a cognitive bias of character to attract the audience.

Shobha De craftily uses cognitive bias to capture vain of the reader, whether deliberately or not delivers the commercial package with money, sex and fantasy, in the backhand she hits with hard truth, reality, emotional fractures, betrayal and backstabbing. Geeta Barua in her article, "Rise and fall of a star: A study of *Starry Nights*" comments: "The novel is also a faithful portrayal of the film world with all its perfidies, glamour, crimes, lies, and deceits and sexual exploitation. Since Shobha De the novelist has been long associated with the Bombay film world as a journalist she knows it first hand and has been able to portray it well". It is undeniably authentic, the Protagonist, the characters all coincide with the events of real life beings. It a perfect blend of half-truth and half false, though there lies cognitive bias in the process of writing. Firstly she uses Identifiable victim effect which affects the audience how an individual is affected rather not how many people are affected stardom and isolation. She uses self-relevance as the reader will always associate themselves to the characters as they love to live a life as Aasha Rani. It is also interesting most writers will use processing difficulty effect that only long paragraphs and long letters will better perform in remembrance, as short pieces will be forgotten, as our brain will take a long time to understand internalise and will store long paragraphs better. *Starry night* holds a bizarre effect as it makes reader to remember the strange story for longer period. At last she tends use base range neglect to depict Aasha rani, as she is very much different from all women in real life, she is a woman of idiosyncrasies, oddity and extremely miserable of what she endured was monstrosity. De diligently uses such storytelling technique to influence the audience and mischievously blends the flaw of decision making bias made in real life to score a great success.

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