
SOCIALITE EVENINGS: A QUEST FOR IDENTITY

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Abstract: Shobha De is one of the most absorbing novelists whose works are a shocking revelation of the film world. An eminent modern novelist and journalist; she has become the symbol of highlighting different perspectives of woman's freedom and liberation. Shobha De claims to be a pioneer in the field of popular fiction writing because she is among the first to explore the world of urban woman in India. Shobha De, a model cum journalist, is hailed as the ultra modern writer in Indian literary world. Her novels and essays shatter patriarchal hegemony. She discusses very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. In fact as a writer, she differs considerably from other Indian women novelists writing in English. She believes in very frank telling of incidents and absolute open-heartedness. One doesn't find anything reserved in her fiction from narrative point of view. The orthodox people in India criticize her for her open discussion on sexual matters. Despite of all criticism, her fiction has got tremendous response not only from several European countries but all over the world. It is no less an achievement. De is best known for her depiction of socialites and sex in her works of fiction, for which she has come to be known as the "[Jackie Collins](#) of India". Alice Jardine rightly remarks about the various problems occurred in the life of women because of their different sex: The putting into discourse is intrinsic to modernity; indeed the valorization of the feminine, woman and her obligatory, that is historical, connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing and speaking. She conceives the extra-marital affairs of women as the stroke to break the traditional and moral values in society. This is one of the most important aspects of her feminism. Her women are daring and courageous in establishing extra-marital affairs to satisfy their natural urge. Her women are not hesitant in using sex as calculated strategy to get social and financial benefit. Marriage for them is an insurance against social values. In her seminal book *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de' Beauvoir rips apart the thin covering of the prevalent social order and instills a sense of rebellion and grit in woman to reject the male hegemony. The critic lays emphasis on woman's equal share in power. She calls upon women to create their own symbolic order by saying that women can only free themselves by "thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men". In her novel *Socialite Evenings*, Karuna is such a woman who declines to follow the traditional path.

Introduction: *Socialite Evenings*, the first novel of Shobha De, is about the journey of a prominent Bombay socialite Karuna, from a gauche middle class girl to a self-sufficient woman. Karuna hails from a conservative middle class family and plunges in the circle of Mumbai high society after her bureaucrat father's posting in this glittering city. She leaves her middle class values and moral standards and embraces the high life of the rich upper class. She walks her way despite strong objections from her parents. Her modeling career which she opts for much against her father's wishes is the first step she takes to become a part of the glamour world. Her meeting with Anjali, a prominent socialite and the wife of a wealthy playboy, makes Karuna's entry into the high society easier. *Socialite Evening* examines how the women break the traditional norms and how the society is westernized in the context of changing social values and customs. It is about the journey of a prominent Mumbai socialite Karuna, from a middle-class girl to a self-sufficient woman. Shobha De's elite and educated women of the upper class family are trapped in the social institution of the marriage for the sake of money and honour. Marriage and family restricts the social position of Shobha De's women in

the novel *Socialite Evenings*. Shobha De's novels pinpoints the customs, traditions and orthodox conceptions of the society wherein a woman's position is regarded to be inferior to their counterpart. Published in the year 1989 it is all about Mumbai's elite seen through the wide eyes of a young woman Shobha De. The novel explores the lives of rich and bored housewives who are trapped in loveless marriages and in having extra marital affairs. The Paper highlights on the very popular theme in fiction that is the search for identity. Marriage and family restricts the social position of Shobha De's women in the novel. As the story unfolds the life of the women, we find the sexual liberties of Anjali who at last seeks solace in religion after her second marriage with Kumar, an impotent and incompatible man; the gorgeous and vivacious Ritu who has developed flirting into a fine art and who leaves her second husband for a smuggler; Si, a highly immoral character and unhappy socialite and Karuna, the protagonist of the novel, a prominent Bombay Socialite belongs to a middle class Brahmin family that falls within rigid patriarchal norms, trying to escape from the boredom of marriage and childbirth. The concepts of sexual behavior of the heroine differ

from that of friends and parents. Socialite Evenings gives a clear picture of the marginalization of Indian women at the hands of their husbands.

Karuna's marriage was not at all a happy one it was a through failure. There was no love nor understanding between the husband and the wife. She did find her husband unexciting and uninspiring and felt that she had married a wrong man. Her marriage is a big problem and grows too unhappy. In the meanwhile she has an affair with her husband's friend Krish. Her affair with Krish was nothing but an escape from her boring married life. Her husband divorces her and Karuna moves out and makes a life of her own. She always wanted to have her own identity and so she is in search of a new identity. She is all set and willing to take a new path and become independent; she doesn't intend anybody's help or any maintenance as she is a divorcee. Karuna's disappointment with her husband nourished her fantasy of a liberated woman. The drastic changes initiated by the elite women of the upper society within the patriarchal setup thrilled her. She says: Women it seemed for the first time could have control over their lives. The scene was changing even in Bombay. Women work, women married, women divorced and women remained single. Soon she realized that her marriage was a failure because of her choice of a wrong person who was "unexciting, untutored". Men have always exercised enormous power over women through controlling their sexuality and reproduction. In traditional societies, women had no rights to take decision on mothering. Karuna soars above the patriarchal limits by venturing rights upon her sexuality as she herself admits the naiveté of the husband and the denuded anger that made the wives miserable. However, her reproductive freedom had not made her happy. Realizing her status as a dependent doll, Karuna, at one time, felt humiliated and considered that she wasn't 'wife material'. So she opted out for her own way.

Karuna's freaking out with Krish and her pregnancy in the aftermath had brought her dilemma to an end. Her decision to remain single after abortion opened up new vistas to her life. Though the inborn motherhood in her confounded her before abortion, her desire to get relieved from all roots of women's oppression succeeded at last. She was not taken back when her mother threatened her with her biological changes in the features of an unmothered woman: You will get a beard by the time you reach forty. And then you will regret your decision⁶. Karuna's reply to her mother that electrolysis was cheaper than children was an indication of her firm faith in liberation. Comparing her own predicament with that of her sister, Karuna envied the freedom of her sister from an unhappy marriage while her own married life

was a play of a witness little charade matching with the life sentence of her mother as a domesticated wife. Her sister's daring step ignited a spark into her. The emotional conflicts between Karuna and her husband before taking up the decision to remain single affirm the mutual expectations of a man and a woman from each other. The little patch of independence after divorce gave Karuna the freedom of action. To her mother's insistence on getting married to the right one for a secured life, she replied that she was at peace with herself minding her business. Her acceptance of her smugness ended up her conversation with her mother as: I don't feel like complicating my life by getting into a second marriage. I like and respect Girish. We share a lot of common interest. But I am not sure I'll make a good wife to him. Or he is a good husband to me. Perhaps we are both far too selfish for marriage. I can't make any sacrifices – not now crossing the barriers of patriarchy might have given Karuna the thrill and happiness of a carefree life. It could have brought Karuna on par with men but her stand does not provide any solution to a woman's responsibility as a biological reproducer. Karuna might have gained access to abortion, birth control and employment and had become totally a liberated individual. She couldn't but accept that her single status "isn't the standard attitude". She is always in a state of trying to find an identity for herself in the society. So she really looks forward to acting. Girish the film maker is impressed by her acting skills and performance and he plans to give her the lead role in his film 'Shakuntala' which is the contemporary version of the Kalidasa classic. Apart from Girish's script the firm for which she was working bags the Best Ad of the year and Karuna gets an individual citation as Copywriter of the year. Karuna also is invited for the Outlooks anniversary party which is considered honourable. Through Karuna, Shobha De presents the picture of an emancipated heroine whose financial independence gives way to social independence and sexual freedom. Even during the period when she was divorced by her husband and had to move from place to place in search of a job, her attitude of being herself did not leave her. Shobha De's women are strivers and aspire, towards freedom, towards goodness, towards a compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity. Her female protagonists are just remarkable when measured against men. Men-women relation is almost hollow, intellectual and compromising. The men-women's complimentary image has been completely shattered. In her novels, the world is out of sexual order. She has tried to highlight discord in marital relationship. It is usual very painful and destructive for them to be

together. Shobha De presents Karuna as a self confident and potential woman who strives to get total freedom from man and to change the social concept of women. She shows her faith in the power of women. Karuna represents her new women who are full of confidence and look forward hopefully for a satisfied free life. She represents the middle class urban married women who are conscious of their legal, social and conjugal rights. She is possessive and committed to realize her dreams anyhow. Like traditional wife, she doesn't think of morality. She manipulates man and marriage as an opportunity to actualize her goals. Whenever this commitment is not fulfilled she rebels and comes out as a non conformist. She emerges with her new identity and

changing image as a modern Indian educated married woman.

Conclusion: The enduring theme is a search for identity of the protagonist Karuna who finds fulfillment and self in a creative occupation. The female character's hatred towards a middle class pedantic life forces her for a yearning of a sophisticated life. Wealth and its accompanying social status are constantly sought by Karuna. Karuna is typical of Shobha De's women characters who initially yearns for a sophisticated life but later is contented with her life. Through Karuna, De presents the picture of an emancipated heroine whose financial independence gives way to social independence and sexual freedom.

References:

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11. *International Journal of English and Education* ISSN: 2278-4012, Volume:2, Issue:1, January 2013 253 Copyright © International Journal of English and Education | www.ijee.org MULTI-FACETS OF WOMEN IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SHOBHA DE V.SARALADEVI RESEARCH SCHOLAR MANONMANIAM SUNDARANAR UNIVERSITY, TIRUNELVELI.

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