

SHOBA DE'S *SOCIALITE EVENINGS*: A FEMINIST SAGA

Dr G. G. Patil, Asst Professor of English, P. C. Jabin Science College, Vidyanagar, Hubballi--580031

Shoba De is an Indian woman writer. She is a well-known feminist. They say she is a radical feminist at that. Feminism is a doctrine, and movement too, that stand and stare for emancipating woman and empowering her. Feminist criticism grew up with Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (1949), and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Later feminists have been Germaine Greer, Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter and others. There have been three waves of feminism. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms states that, "Feminist asserts for the independence of woman in all the spheres of life. It goes beyond literature to explore the socio-economic status of women." (*Penguin Dictionary* 317) Radical feminists are there though rare and they go to any extent to assert their independence and equality in society. Some of them, even refuse to marry and do family life. They are called spinsters.

Shoba De (once Rajadhyaksha or Kilachand) hails from Satara, MS. She was born in 1948, a year after India's independence. She is one of the finest popular novelists in India today. She is best known for her depiction of socialites and sex in her novels like *Socialite Evenings* and *Snapshots*.

Shobha De's occupation is that she is a writer. We can modify the phrase by saying a woman author. She is a columnist too, with a rapport with journalism. Her career is interesting. She began modelling at age 17. She switched over to journalism, soon becoming 'agony aunt' for society magazines like *Stardust*, that featured Bollywood interviews, gossips and photographs. She became a columnist for *The Times of India*. She has written soaps for television. Ankita Shukla writes, "Shobha De was memorable for her descriptions. De's women range from traditional, subjugated and marginalized to the extremely modern and liberated women." (Shukla, 2)

Shobha De's major novel *Socialite Evenings* sounds like an alerting thing to the youth of the country. In fact, it is debut novel. It describes Mumbai's high society, exploring the lives of bored, rich housewives. They are trapped in loveless marriages, and engaged in ill-fated extramarital affairs. The men use their women for social respectability, fashionable parties, false spiritual leaders, and the decadence. We notice people's hankering for modernization and westernization.

The novel *Socialite Evenings* projects Karuna's story. In fact, it seems to be autobiographical to.

Shobha De has exhorted the feminine sensibility in her works. Through the help of her female characters, she herself has discarded the value of family and marriage. A woman in Indian society marries not just the man but also his family and subsequently loses her identity and liberty in the marriage, relinquishes her freedom, and sets about pleasing everybody.

Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* moves around Karuna, a prominent Bombay socialite, Anjali, and Ritu, who long for liberty and status. They are not projected as the traditional wives, ready to execute any responsibility. Karuna, Anjali and Ritu, do not lay emphasis on marriage and family. As it is clear, the present novel is in the form of her memoirs. As the story unfolds, we see the girls from middle class' metamorphose into a star and these are friends - neurotic, man-hungry, Anjali, gorgeous, vivacious Ritu, who has developed flirting into a flirt - art and deserts her second husband and prefers to live with a smuggler. Both Karuna and Anjali belong to the middleclass family where there are the values of marriage and the importance of family. Karuna's mother prefers the traditional way of life:

A woman cannot live alone. It is not safe. We are here today but who knows about tomorrow? A woman needs a man's protection. Society can be very cruel- a woman's real place is in her husband's house, not in her parents. Take your time but marry. And marry the right one that is important before, we die, we want to see you secure and at peace. (*Socialite Evenings* 76)

Shobha De too advocates the marriage but with a right one who can understand his wife's inner feelings, pangs and desire.

Socialite Evenings presents a picture of the upper class of society. So, characters like De's are on the fingers that hold the marriage without religion. The female protagonists Karuna, Anjali and Ritu are aware of their self-realization. They are not ready to demolish their identities. They raise their voices against inequality. As they know, a woman is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has been assigned a subordinate and relative position.

De's women change their match as men change their clothes. Karuna changes her male partner like Charlie, Bunty, Abe, Krish Mukharjee. Anjali has been married to a wealthy playboy, then Abbas Tyabjee or Abe, then a little affair with a married high income tax officer, Pierre- a French tutor, who is also a divorcee, a Punjabi Delhi based boy Karan Kumar Bhandari, who has been married twice. Ritu married first with a sadist, second with a smuggler, Gul. Swati also takes divorce from her London based engineer. Girish Sridhar, a widower film director wants to make Karuna his wife. Karuna's original husband married and divorced from Winnie because she proves to be a slut. The novelist's characters act fearless. They do not let the age-old rules to dominate them. They walk further in their lives keeping the moral and traditional values away. They consider marriage and family to satisfy their own superiority. Dr. Van De Vede notes in the beginning as under:

I show you here the way to deal with marriage. You know the honeymoon of rapture, it is all too short. And soon you decline into that morass of disillusion and depression, which is all you know of marriage. But the bridal honeymoon should blossom into a perfect flower of ideal marriage. May this book help you to attain such happiness (Th. H. Van De Velde: 275).

Nourishing this opinion Shobha De's female characters, Karuna, Anjali and Ritu are not ready to be exploited, and to give their liberty. They break all types of patriarchal pressures. Karuna keeps in her mind the real picture of Indian wife in the corner of her mind.

Anjali, who is a socialite in her mid-forties, was the child of a Hindu father and Jain mother. Her bringing up is executed in the middle-class family. So, Anjali never likes to see herself in this class who suffers economically. She revolts against her parents when they insist her to change her decision. She tells them frankly. "Basically, I wanted to get out of the closed, boring, and middle-class environment of my family. I wanted to be on my own, independent. To see the world, meet people, buy lovely clothes and perfumes" (*Socialite Evenings* 38).

Anjali makes her relationship with a married high-income tax official and she tells about this relationship to Karuna, "Yes, I have slept with him. It was wonderful. I felt earth move [...] for the first time, I felt something". (*Socialite Evenings* 121) Shobha De raves up the courage of married women who do not feel any shame letting their husbands to join other women.

In his songs the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore said, "Woman, you are one half woman and one-half dream". Karuna too has both fact and fantasy. Her imaginary craving for the fulfillment of her physical desire finds place in Malabar Hills. The regular haunt of Karuna is symbolically the projection of her fancy, her dream which in reality is but a myth. A woman lives in a world of fancy, insignificant but profoundly imaginative. Talking of woman, Virginia Woolf says,

Imaginatively, she is of the highest importance. Practically she is completely insignificant. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips in her life she could hardly read, could hardly spell and was the property of her husband. (Woolf 45-

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The novelist De has placed emphasis upon the freedom of woman in the changing situation. De delves into the new concept of marriage and family.

References:

1. De Shoba. *Socielite Evenings*. Mumbai: Harpercollins, 2017.
2. Shukla, Ankita. Wikipedia on Shobha De. Wiki.org
3. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*. London: Penguin, 1998.