

---

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**THE DIALECTICS OF MALE –FEMALE SPACE IN SHOBHA DE’S *SOCIALITE EVENING***

---

**Dr. Hyacinth Pink,**

Prof. & Head, Dept. of English,  
Kumaraguru College of Technology,  
Chinnavedampatti, Sarvanampatti,  
Coimbatore -641049

Shobha De, a charismatic yet revolutionary fighter for women’s rights and freedom focuses on diverse women’s issues in her novel *Socialite Evenings*. Shobha De is an author with a difference. She is a writer who believes in a very frank narration of incidents and absolute open-heartedness. The present article “*The Dialectics of Male –Female Space in Shoba de’s Socialite Evenings*” reflects the authour’s concern with women’s issues, and advocates granting the same political, social and economic rights to women as those enjoyed by men. It is a novel which radiates a fight against women oppression. Shobha De attempts to discuss diverse situations in a woman’s life and helps them break free from the traditional, and progress towards the modern. *Socialite Evenings* clearly spells out the dialectics of male - female space through the life of her protagonist, Karuna’s. Karuna is a representation of any traditional woman, who is marginalized in a marital relationship, but who in the course of the novel evolves into the New Woman. The new generation of feminism recognizes

that sexual pleasure is a central part of women’s sexuality.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Women’s Suffering, Psychic, Indian Society, New Woman.

### **Introduction**

The dialectics of male –female space is largely a post-independence, social phenomenon in India, a phenomenon influenced by various changing forces of reality - freedom movement, progressive education, social reforms, increasing contacts with the west, urban growth etc. Women writers who emerged in the last quarter of the 19th century radiated a double implication. It bore testimony to the birth of a new era of emancipation for the Indian women, an era of increased

RESEARCH ARTICLE

opportunities and a more dynamic participation in the social and intellectual life of the country heralded in by social reorientations which evolved at the beginning of the century. Secondly, it was also a commentary on the rise of individualism in the life and letters of the age, an individualism which is closely associated with the rise of the novel in India in the same way in which it was associated with the rise of the English novel.

The dialectics of this male –female space to secure women's rights on the one hand, and love, respect, sympathy and understanding from males on the other developed as a worldwide crusade. This dialectics concentrates on the problems and perspectives of women who strive for acknowledgement and endurance and ensure that they stop suffering silently in helplessness.

Shobha De, a well-known modern novelist and journalist deals with the theme of women's liberation- women space of her own - in almost all her novels - *Socialite Evenings*, *Strange Obsession*, *Sisters*, *Sultry Days* and *Starry Nights*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her article, *Can, the Subaltern Speak?* Writes:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of woman disappears not into a pristine nothingness, but into a

violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'Third – World Woman' caught between tradition and modernization. (p.80)

Simone De Beauvoir's adds to this criticism and has very precisely exposed the condition of woman in her most famous book *The Second Sex*.

*Socialite Evenings* is Shobha De's first novel. It describes a backdrop of Mumbai's high society and the lives of bored, rich housewives trapped in loveless marriages and engaging in ill-fated extramarital affairs, smug selfish husbands who project their wives more as a social respectability than for love, fashionable parties, false spiritual leaders, and a portrait of the general moral, spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy and decadence of Mumbai. Elite, who have traded in their traditional culture for almost a total westernization and the discarding of any discernible values other than materialism.

The relation between the search for self and the problem of existence has become a popular theme among the women writers of Indian fiction in English. The modern woman is well on her way in the feminine quest for identity. Inheriting a cumulative wisdom from her predecessors she is now competent enough to call a spade, a spade. She has a strong affinity for

RESEARCH ARTICLE

tradition but a stronger attachment to self-respect and individuality.

**Literature Review**

Jaydipsingh. Dodiya's *The Fiction of Shobha De* portrays Shobha De's emergence as a major novelist on the Indian literary scene. This book comprising more than thirty critical essays, analyses her first novel, *Socialite Evenings* to the latest autobiographical work *Speed post*, and explores Shobha De, as a sensitive feminist writer. The book makes a pioneering attempt at exploring De's fictional world that has aroused so much curiosity and interest among readers. Chaudhary Dr.B. Dinesh's book *Shobha De as a Post Modern Indian Woman Novelist* is a configuration of diverse articles written by some of the eminent experts on Shobha De to highlight the concept of postmodernism. Their articles and reviews provide a large support to justify Shobha De as a postmodernist feminist writer. Surabhi Khosla in her article *The New Age of Women Authors* discusses the writings of Shobha De – e.g. Sexuality in still painful to men...it could mean women talking about their husbands shortcomings or writing about being bored with them sexually, mentally or spiritually. Ladva R Rajesh's *The Concept of New Woman in Shobha De's Second Thoughts: A Feeling of Incompleteness and Stereotypes* observes *Socialite Evenings* is a novel of incompleteness women and is populated

with more stereotypes than characters. The stereotypes are mainly of women. Ningthoujam's thesis on *Image of the New Woman in the Novels of Shobha De* highlights Shobha De as a Contemporary novelist who presents the modern Indian woman at the centre of her fiction. This new woman is bold, daring and ambitious.

It is the image of this new woman that Shobha De presents in all her novels. Swain, S.P. *Socialite Evenings: A Feminist Study, The Fiction of Shobha De* discusses Shobha de as a feminist writer, and how Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* raises a strong protest against the male-dominated Indian society where women are deprived of the freedom to act and live according to their will. In this fact changing world, the role of women in the society too, has been changing fast, affecting greatly the sexual monograms and social norms prevalent in the society. Shobha De reacts against the male culture and strongly detests the marginalization of women. *The dialectics of Male –Female Space in Shobha De's Socialite Evenings* is a spectrum of many colours-soft, prominent and strident. The female voices emanating from this novel vary from the traditional but conscious of their selves to exclusively self-seeking feminists with a vengeance.

**Discussion and Analysis** Shobha De's maiden novel *Socialite Evenings* discusses the story of Karuna, a prominent Mumbai socialite. Karuna is pictured not only as a

RESEARCH ARTICLE

protagonist but also as a motivating factor in the society, initiating and regulating her own life as well as the lives of others in the fascinating world of Mumbaitees. *Socialite Evenings* gives the picture of the marginalization of Indian women at the hands of their husbands. But Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* is a different woman. She is all-eager to break-out of such control which “compels her to assume the status of the other” (Simone de Beauvoir, 85).

Karuna, the main protagonist and narrator is caught up in a drab, boring life and seeks to escape by writing her memoirs. Through her memoirs she achieves some sense of fame and pride in herself as she becomes an active socialite and eventually uses her newfound prominence as a celebrity to get herself a position as an advertising copywriter and creator of a television series. She found her middle class life mundane and longed for an exciting life. This longing took root in her when the family migrated to Mumbai. The move to the city came at just the right time when Karuna was in her childhood. Mumbai was mind-boggling but to Karuna it was a perfect city that suited her extravagant life.

But the moment we stepped out of the filthy train and on to the slushy platform at Bombay central, I knew I'd finally found 'my' city. Dirty, overcrowded, impersonal and entirely wonderful. Everything fascinated me,

including the rowdy railway porters in fire-engine-red uniforms. (SE, p.13)

Karuna's dislike for the middle class society and her desire to live an extravagant life like the rich made her problematic and disobedient both at home and at school. She did not want to be an ordinary middle class girl and she showed her opposition by her rebellious behaviour at home. “Not jumping at the sound of her father's voice booming out some command... not covering in the presence of 'elders.’” (SE, p.15). At school her defiance took on another form. Since she could not get things which the rich children could, she could not flaunt herself, there arose in her the hatred for the common and ordinary things, she did not like taking the seven-thirty train or a double-decker to school, while others rolled up in glooming bikes. She chose to be different so that she could have the same attention, which was enjoyed by the rich girls. She decided, to attract others attention by wearing her sash hipster style, lifting the hem of her dress higher than was allowed and swaggering around the basketball court as though she owned it. She was showing her anger and resentment at her victimization in whatever way she could, assuming the role of “a saucy kid, small for her age, oppressed at home and hungering for things she didn't have.” (p.15).

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The richness of the city and high life of the people attracted her and she preferred to discover Mumbai rather than take interest in her studies. Karuna's desires to be like the rich girls, naturally made her choose her companions from that society. In her school days, she saw the world mainly through the prism of Charlie. Charlie was the spoilt girl of her society with whom Karuna hung around and often got into trouble. Though Karuna knew it was not good to have relationships with such girls, her wish to be noticed by all, made her stick to them. Karuna's hunger for things that were denied to her was immense and her desire grew greater because it was never fed. Even though half the students from her class were from the middle class like herself, she was not happy because she did not belong to "the luckier other half" (p.15). She desperately wanted to be in the charmed circle of rich girls who had everything. "Karuna thus begins her quest for selfhood" (Urbashi Barat, 121).

The submissive nature of Karuna's mother towards her father was one of the reasons for Karuna's hatred towards the middle class society. Someone or the other controlled the middle class women's life. The women always lived for their parents, for their husbands or for their children but never for themselves. They did not have a life of their own.

Mother was always preoccupied with what to cook for father's

dinner. It never mattered what the children's preferences were. It was always him...whatever little time was left over from looking after his needs was then almost absent-mindedly distributed among the three of us.(SE, p.12)

Karuna detested the submissive life led by her mother. So it was natural that she revolted against the middle class life where a woman has no life of her own, whereas the women in high society were different. They went to clubs and they were least bothered about their children or family. This kind of life was seen in Charlie's home. "We stole her mother's lipstick and money for the tickets and ice-creams. Her mother never found out. She was too busy playing rummy at the club" (20).

The protagonist, Karuna, was "clear-eyed about the implications of her social status and the patriarchal regimentation of her middle-class life" (Urbashi Barat 121). As a result she rebelled, especially against the domination of an overbearing father who decided everything for his family. He spoke rarely to the children. Karuna did not want to be an obedient daughter like her sisters for she felt that only the middle class girls obey their parents.

Karuna's quest to find out about herself sprang from her discontentment with her own life, which did not come up to her expectations. With all her

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

discontentment that engenders mental struggle and a rebellious nature, and with her reasoning she walked the ways of the unreasonable in the eyes of society and remained a different person throughout. Karuna's sister sensed this:

You were always a strange one, right from childhood; I wouldn't ever figure you out. I used to think you were slow or vain or both. But there was always something secretive going on inside your mind that none of us knew about. You weren't like the others. (SE, p.180)

In spite of her father reprimanding her quite often, she continued to work as a model. The act of rebellion kept her modelling going on and she worked in more and more advertisements. Karuna's identity as a model was first created when a series of her photographs appeared in the newspaper. The public recognition of her work commenced from here. Karuna's father was helpless in controlling his disobedient and stubborn daughter. "Father pretended he didn't know I was doing the show. Mother pretended she didn't know where I was going three afternoons a week. And I pretended I didn't notice them pretending not to know" (SE, p.27).

Anjali with her polished nails, French perfumes and the silver grey Impala, belonged to that society of the socialite,

which Karuna was longing for. Soon Anjali's fancy place in Malabar Hill became the regular haunt of Karuna. The gaudy and cheap imitation of a third-rate Hollywood film set impressed Karuna. Anjali became her guide to a new world. "She offered me the opportunity to be everything I ever wanted to be" (SE, p.15).

Since Anjali was the portal of a world she longed for, Karuna was not able to remove Anjali from her life. Anjali became her role model. When Anjali provided Karuna an opportunity to travel on her own to Delhi to model, Karuna realized that "modelling was not quite my thing. I wasn't an exhibitionist, I wasn't confident, I felt ridiculous on the ramp" (SE, p.32). Knowing Anjali fully well, Karuna moved with her only to be with the aristocratic people and the society. Anjali's visit to Karuna's home at first embarrassed her because her unfashionable middle-class surroundings were a direct contrast to Anjali's perfect home. At the same time Anjali's unannounced visits were also an eye-opener to Karuna when she discovered that Anjali was just as middle class as she was. The friendship between Anjali and the protagonist took a new turn when Anjali encouraged Karuna to accept Abe's offer, instead of acknowledging and applauding Karuna's loyalty.

I realized the ridiculousness of my position in their lives. I was nothing

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

to either of them. Not even a plaything, any longer. The tension of the hunt was over. They must be looking for a new toy now, I reasoned, and decided to get out. (SE, p.50)

Karuna managed to make enough money through modelling to buy herself a ticket to New York. “For the very first time, I felt ready. On my own, free of Anjali, prepared to discover the world on my own terms. I felt reckless and brave, adventurous and liberated” (SE, p.50). This was of course the real journey of self-discovery. Though she was disturbed by the marriage proposal from the filmmaker in New York, it helped her to rethink her decision about her engagement with Bunty. Karuna decided to break her engagement with Bunty; she also realized that she couldn't marry the ad-film-maker. Finally Karuna returned to India with no decisions on her career and marriage. To make such decision she needed time to think. It required privacy and her Indian home hardly afforded her that. Still Karuna felt assertive. Karuna informed Bunty “you know I need my own space. I feel claustrophobic. I need to find myself” (SE, p.55). Finally she managed to break off her four-year-old engagement with Bunty. The central character then agreed to marry an old college friend for “his head-on, dead-on approach” (SE, p.58). She was simply pushed into marriage “by an acceptable male who wouldn't take

no for an answer” (SE, p.58). Karuna's husband Shetty was the heir to a hundred-year-old export-import firm. He had innovative ideas and soon dismantled the cabin system and opened workstations in the American style. The old munimji and the peon retired and the Xerox machine took their place. Karuna realized that the working style of the firm reflected her husband exactly, flashy but lacking in depth. Karuna soon realized that she was caught up in a meaningless marriage.

Karuna's marriage turned out to be a failure since it was loveless, joyless and bridgeless. There was no understanding between husband and wife. She felt that she had married “the wrong man for the wrong reason at the wrong time. My husband was not a villain. He was just an average Indian husband - unexciting, uninspiring, and untutored... he wasn't one for introspection” (SE.p.65). She hated the standoffish, cruel behaviour of the husbands who often kept themselves busy in drab monotonous activities like reading the business pages of the Times of India. Karuna observes that “everything that mattered to us was trivialized. The message was "you don't really count, except in the context of my priorities." It was taken for granted that our needs were secondary to theirs. And that in some way we ought to be grateful for having a roof over our head and four square meals a day.” (p.69) “Karuna remains a lone wolf among the circle of

RESEARCH ARTICLE

wives with her discontentment” (Sangeeta Yadav, 134). Karuna realized that she had committed a mistake in taking the decision to marry this person without realizing or coming to terms with herself completely. It became clearer to her when her marriage became meaningless and their love- making an affair. Her discontentment sprang mainly from a world of difference between her concept of marriage and that of the society. Her marriage she felt was over and meaningless.

We've got nothing going on. I don't love you ...never have. As for you, I really don't know to this day why you chose to marry me. I don't think you even know whom you married. You don't have a clue as to what sort of a woman I am. I'm tired of your smugness, your irritating mannerisms; the ways you take me for granted and expect me to fall into your overall scheme of things... I was another one of your well-calculated deals. (SE, pp.184-85)

To her utter bewilderment and disappointment, Karuna was made to live a subordinate life like her mother. Her modelling stopped and she became a dutiful wife just obeying her husband. He brainwashed her and made her feel inferior and worthless. Karuna realized then that men were no different in the aristocratic society. They were just like her father,

loved to dominate their women folk. Yet she boldly and defiantly encountered life, for she realized “marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to” (SE, p.68). Karuna also realized that despite her little acts of protest, she was “a well-trained, Indian wife” (SE, p.51). Yet Karuna was not “the toy of man, his rattle, this must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused” (Mary Wollstonecraft, 34)

It was not possible for her to become an average Indian wife to match her husband and fashion herself as per the likes and dislikes of her husband. She felt that it was not for her to pretend to be a ‘dependent doll’ because she was not a ‘wife material’. But she could not shake off her marriage as she had done with her modeling profession. She was not able to take a quick decision to divorce her husband and relieve herself from the unhappy situation.

Karuna involved herself in theatre. This involvement brought her close to Krish, a married man and a friend of her husband “more Krish than theatre” (SE, p.164). Karuna's three years affair with Krish made her to go to the extent of meeting him in Venice. Karuna planned well in such a way that her unsuspecting husband send her happily to stay with her sister in London. Karuna did not even feel a tinge of guilt or remorse of shame; she was

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

not even moved by her husband's words. "I'll miss you, wifey. Our home won't be the same without you" (SE, p.179). She waved to him cheerfully. At that moment the one thing that mattered to her was being with Krish.

Karuna was bold enough to express without any hesitation her sexual urge for a man, even to her husband when he discovered her affair. She made an ingenious declaration about her inner thirst.

I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him in Venice. There is a good chance that I will feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. Maybe he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant me. In this case it will really be A Death in Venice. (SE, p.186)

Karuna's self-centeredness is seen when she discovered that she was pregnant. She was bothered about what the society would think of her and not the baby. The discovery that she was 'pregnant' made her quite nervous and she was in a state of panic. Karuna was not heart broken when her husband wanted to break up their marriage suspecting her paternity. She was able to move out and make a life for herself. Here she differed from her orthodox mother. Karuna was able to escape from a meaningless marriage boldly, unlike her mother. Karuna wanted to lead a

luxurious life but when she left her husband's house she took nothing except a few things necessary for her. She believed there was nothing in the house that belonged to her any more once her husband had decided to divorce her.

Her husband cheated her by not giving the alimony after the divorce; Karuna was also not interested even in her husband's alimony. Her sole concern during this stage, too, was how she can shake off her middle - class background. Karuna moved to Anjali's house with a few belongings. Anjali was furious that Karuna had not taken her jewels and other valuables with her "this is not the time for false dignity and pride, woman; she advised 'don't be a fool, you are entitled to your things' (SE, p.217). For Karuna even the idea of keeping the baby did not stay firm in her mind. Anjali was a well-experienced woman.

When Karuna thought of not aborting the child, Anjali put out that thought by saying that Karuna's child should not have a lonely and unhappy life like Mimi with divorced parents. With her abortion and her hysterectomy, Karuna was freed of her most potent symbol of femaleness, and was ready to progress towards androgyny and creativity; creative women, as Rosalind Miles points out, are more often than not childless. Karuna's fear was that her present predicament was the consequence of divine justice. When Karuna realized that she did

RESEARCH ARTICLE

not have anything to claim as her own, and no one to rely upon except herself, she felt that she had to do something decisive about her life. For the first time, she felt the need for a room and money of her own. She took up odd jobs. Soon she understood that the meager amount coming from the odd jobs could only afford her a middle class life, which she found intolerable.

And I hated the poverty, this meager income forced on me. I suppose I was a bit too old for the drastic changes I had to adjust to; or perhaps I just wasn't cut out to be middle class, lower middle class. For a start, there was the matter of transport. I'd never traveled by bus since my school days or waited in queues for anything. Getting into a local train and commuting to town was a major trauma. I could not relate to the other women in my compartment. I felt revolted by their small concerns. I'd watch with horror as they squabbled over small change and petty issues. Their conversations depressed me. It was all so much stomach ... Sometimes I'd over - hear a husband being discussed, but it was invariably in servile terms. Every problem of theirs seemed trivial and insignificant to me. The details of their lives –the spats with the mother-in-law, a child with mumps,

school admissions and donation money, husband's stalled promotions, office gossip, a crisis at the neighbourhood crèche, an ailing parent, a relative's hernia operation, saree sales at Kala Nike tan, Haldi verses ,Cold Cream, Garden Vareli at a suburban store, discounts at Sahakari Bhandar. I hated to be in that environment."(SE, pp.240-41)

Karuna started out life afresh on her own, staying in PG accommodations; she began to earn her own living and to search for fulfilment in the theatre. Karuna had a small role in the Hindi version of 'Desire under the Elms' directed by Swapna. Luck, hard work, ambition and her skill, everything played an important role in Karuna's life. Once money started flowing in, Karuna started to analyze herself and in the process she found out that it was the freedom to do what she liked that gave her absolute joy. With this realization she started encasing joy through the acts she liked. Her decision to stick to the part-time job and her staying with her parents, looking after their needs, like a responsible daughter, were those little acts of independence that brought her real joy. When people asked her to quit her part-time job for a lucrative business she felt that:

I suppose my real concerns were different. It wasn't money or

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

success I was looking forward to in my life at that point; it was the freedom to do what I wanted. My part-time job gave me that. (SE, pp273-74)

Karuna felt so satisfied looking after her parents. She enjoyed this company, care, love and concern. Unlike in the past, now she had privacy and freedom in her parent's house. She felt so contented and happy. She could not sacrifice this independence and happiness to anything, which did not give her happiness however reasonable it was in the eyes of society.

The last of the tests which Karuna had to face deals with a famous art-film-maker, Girish Sridhar, who with his son, Kunal took her immediately ;and with him she felt an instinctive affinity, Girish offered a role in his adaptation of Shakuntala and made her feel so comfortable with him. Karuna was secure enough to return to her parents. This sparked of her creative spirit; she began writing scripts for ad-films almost as though inspired. The easy relationship she shared with everyone around her, charged her emotionally and intellectually. When the gossip magazines were full of spiteful stories about her and Girish, he offered to come to her rescue. Karuna did not take any hasty decision, instead she coolly requested:

I feel all closed-up and insulated. I need a little time. I'm discovering stuff about myself. I enjoyed this little patch of independence. I'm reconnecting with my parents - they need me. I'm enjoying their presence. We may not talk very much, but it's a lovely feeling to have them at home when I get back. Don't rush me, please. (Pp.255-56)

Karuna realized that she couldn't be happy with Girish in spite of their common interests; in fact she felt that she couldn't be happy with any man who deprived her of her present state of independence. Karuna refused him, even though her parents urged her to marry him. Karuna also tackled Varun, the powerful editor of the scandal sheet who attacked her, with equanimity and poise. Karuna's mother with her motherly anxiety asked her to settle soon in her life saying, "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" (SE, p.275). Karuna analyzing herself felt that she's not ready to sacrifice her independent, peaceful single life to marriage, which required a lot of sacrifices. Constant searches for her made her ask:

But mother, why does security rest with a man? I feel confident now that I can look after myself. I'm earning as much as any man. I have a roof over my head. I don't really have any

RESEARCH ARTICLE

responsibilities. I am at peace with myself. I'm not answerable to anyone. 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 interests. But I'm not sure I'll make a good wife for him, or he a good husband for me. Perhaps we are both far too selfish for marriage. I can't make any 'sacrifice'- not now. (S E p.276)

Karuna knew the difficulties of staying single in society. But at the same time, she felt that for the sake of society, she couldn't make her life miserable "She knows sharing her hard earned room with a wrong person is spoiling the beauty of the room totally" (Inna Walter 158). Towards the end Karuna is a person who understood herself fully and confidently comes out with a statement saying that being single was good for her, a decision taken due to the result of her constant intensive search for herself.

Anjali and Ritu are the other main characters in *Socialite Evenings*. They are rich, confident and beautiful. Anjali was the role model for Karuna. All these female characters including Karuna settle in a high-class society and are enslaved by their husbands. Anjali is married to Abe who sleeps with all Anjali's friends, even after discovering Abe's betrayal; Anjali finds it difficult to break up with him. Later when she leaves Abe, she searches for the

company of other men and finally gets wedded to Kumar after researching his financial status.

Ritu is married to an underworld don. She is so dependent on Gul's mercy that she agrees to procure other women for him. These characters are so dependent on men, physically and emotionally that they fall prey to the 'I-cannot-live-without-a-male' syndrome. Anjali gives up her career, independence and a husband for the homosexual Kumar. Ritu's villainous Gul goes so far as to humiliate her in public. Still she claims "I think the beatings have brought us closer. I respect him more. He looks so macho in those moments" (SE, p.130). In this way Anjali and Ritu are kept in continual marital dependence upon their husbands.

Karuna's experiences throw light into the lives of present day elite class. There is a representative character from each class in the novel -Anjali, Ritu and Si are the upper class society women, Babajii as a modern saint, Abe as a businessman, Varun as a high-profile media person, Girish as an art film maker and last but not least Karuna as a celebrity writer. Out of all the relationships that Karuna narrates in the novel, her relationship with Anjali attains special reference. During her teen days, Anjali becomes the symbol of everything that Karuna wants to become in life. As

RESEARCH ARTICLE

time passes away, Karuna attains the social status that she always longed for. However, Anjali looms all over her life from the first meeting till she completes her narration.

Her mentor Anjali initiated Karuna into the life of a model, and modelling helped her to create an identity for herself. But Karuna differs from Anjali and Ritu, when she found that her husband was destroying her identity and self, Karuna took a bold step to leave her husband. In the later part of the novel she rejects Girish's son Kunal's offer to go and live with them. Karuna "carves out her own niche in the professionally competitive world of advertising and acquires all the resources" (Chandra 2000: 147) and unlimited freedom necessary to live an independent life with no man to dictate terms.

If Karuna's life is divided into three phases - before marriage, married life, life after the separation from her husband. One can see how Karuna has been a different girl, a different wife and a different woman with her own expectations of life, and how the quest to know about herself which has started towards the end of the first phase is stopped abruptly with her marriage and has been under control in the second phase only to be resurrected in the third phase more powerfully making her disgustingly self-assured and revoltingly self-sufficient. The modern woman does not find any sense in such self-sacrifice and yearns for self-expression, individuality and self-identity.

She is trying to free herself of the dependence syndrome according to Chaman Nahal.

I define Feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome, where it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religions group, ethnic group when women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes. (p.30)

*Socialite Evenings* gives us the picture of the marginalization of Indian women at the hands of their husbands. Simone de Beauvoir expresses his own views on man - woman nexus --- man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity." (Beauvoir, 1988: 534)

A woman is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a subordinate and relative position.

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without

RESEARCH ARTICLE

man. And she is simply what man decrees. She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex.... absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. (Beauvoir, 1988: 534)

Karuna, is not concerned with the lot of women. But here that concern changes to 'I am the good thing' and even this 'I' does not stand for any commitment to spiritual and moral values but it is 'a good thing' because it can be dressed up and presented as an extremely marketable product in the media. Karuna's pre-occupation with 'I' and 'the good thing is me' becomes clear when the journalist of foreign magazines comes up with a proposal to make a documentary with Karuna's experiences as the focal point of such a film. Karuna's reply to such an idea is "I think it's a great idea. In fact; I think I'll steal it. There may be a documentary in it but I'm going to give a book, a shot. I've always wanted to write one - so you can take a walk, Yankee agent. I know when I'm on to a good thing and the good thing is me; if anyone is going to cash in on this, baby, it isn't going to be you ....." (SE p.306) Even during the period when she has been divorced by her husband and has to move from place to place in search of a job,

her sole concern is to overcome the poverty she feared:

And I hated the poverty, this meager income forced on me. I suppose I was a bit too old for the drastic changes I had to adjust to or perhaps I just wasn't cut out to be middle class, lower middle class.

For a start, there was the matter of transport. I'd never traveled by bus since my school days. Or waited in queues for anything. Getting into a local train and commuting to town was a major trauma. I could not relate to the other women in my compartment. I felt revolted by their small concerns. I'd watch with horror as they squabbled over small change and petty issues. Their conversations depressed me. It was all so much stomach - Turing, their talk of vegetable price and milk strikes. Sometimes I'd over - hear a husband being discussed, but it was invariably in servile terms. Every problem of theirs seemed trivial and insignificant to me. The quotidian detail of their lives – spats with the mother - in - law, a child with mumps, school admissions and donation money, husband's stalled promotions, office gossip, a crisis at the neighborhood crèche, an ailing parent, a relative's hernia operation, sari sales at Kala Niketan, haldi verses cold cream, Garden Vareli at a suburban store, discounts at Sahakari Bhandar. I hated to be in that environment." (SE pp 240-41)

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Conclusion**

In a patriarchal society, it is the male who abuses and subaltern attitude of woman finds themselves dumbfounded of feminine liberty and equality. "He brainwashes me constantly. I'm made to feel obliged and in debt. It's awful, but even my insistence on working and contributing to the running expenses of the house has become a battleground. I don't know what to do - either way I'm stuck. (SE, p.69) Karuna's husband is inadequate and incomplete since he lacks the traits of an ideal husband. Karuna wonders, how could women communicate anything at all to men who perpetually sat reading pages of the Times of India while concentrated picking their nose? (SE p.8) Karuna's imaginary craving for the fulfillment of her physical desire finds reflection in her fantasies. Anjali's fancy place in Malabar Hill where Karuna usually goes is symbolically the projection of her fancy, her dream which is reality. I think our marriage was over the day our awful honeymoon started. We've got have. As for you – I really don't know to this day why you chose to marry me. I don't think you even know who you married. You don't have a clue what sort of woman I am. (SE, p.185)

Karuna faced all difficulties and did not protest but obeyed her husband dutifully. Her husband was not a cruel person and he even throws away all her (Karuna's) sins like her affairs with Girish.

Later also when she leaves her husband's house and starts living with Anjali "the idea of keeping the baby' does not sink into her system firmly. Once again the consideration is herself – whether her parents would accept her with the child. She gives an inkling of her thoughts after her husband has talked to her at length about the settlement. For a couple of days after his call I actually toyed with the idea of keeping the baby. May be it was just spite, may be a felt 'it was what I needed ... someone to call my own as the cliché goes." (SE, p.222) But the moment her friend Anjali hears of such an 'idea' germinating in Karuna's mind, she decides to nip it in the bud. She tells Karuna, "Don't be crazy— A baby is a life-long responsibility ...book at me. Are you prepared to tie yourself down forever? Get a puppy or a kitten if you are feeling all that motherly, forget about a kid. Besides, you won't be able to handle the scene. You are nit cut out for a single parent situation. You can't go around with an orphan Annie — like kid, with no father on the scene." (S E, p.222) Women in Shobha's novels symbolize the overpowering materialism and the lack of spirituality, which characterizes modern age. With the crumbling of moral and ethical values there is an inner conflict which drives the modern Indian women to take shelter in different identities for momentary solace. Girish, the great art film maker, exhorts Karuna to take life more seriously and commit herself to

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

some serious thing like cinema— "But life is about more than just goofy kids and surf - boards.

I want you to get involved. Commit yourself. Get into the mainstream 'The mainstream of what? Cinema? Life? I find all that very complex. (SE, p.255) Girish implied that Karuna should take her role of Shakuntala more seriously in his film. Even her intellectual pursuits suggest that she is in capable of involving herself in anything serious, for her preoccupation is with only 'cross - word puzzles' and 'newspaper - chess'. Karuna maintained just a formal relationship with her husband. Helena Cixous observes: "A male privilege can be seen in the opposition between activity and passivity. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is coupled with the same opposition; activity/ passivity." (Cixous, 1989: 288) Anjali throws off the traditional conventions of moral values.

She enacts a marriage of her choice with Abe. Karuna too discards conventions and indulges in an extra - marital relationship with Krish. As a house wife. Karuna remembers— "I felt like an indifferent boarder in the house, going through the motions of the house keeping and playing wife but the resentment and rebellion remained just below the surface, ready to snap at the slightest provocation." (SE, p.69) When Karuna's husband comes out with a 'package' deal containing an

assured income and all the luxuries which she had hitherto been enjoying. Karuna's only remark is "(the package) sounds sweets'. Similar is the case with Anjali, Her second marriage to the homosexual Kumar is nothing but an exchange for 'the Porches emeralds, holidays in Biarritz, shipping along the champs - Ely sees, a villa in Ooty, parties every night, unlimited champagne and the choice to pick my own bed - mate but only discreetly." (SE-217) Ritu exploits her sexual breakthrough, her female potentiality to keep her husband within her reach, within her control.

Look, what she tells Karuna about her strategy. "... make them feel you have done them a favor by marrying them - make them feel insecure. Let them think you'll walk out on them if they don't toe the line. That's what puts them in their place." (SE-86) Even the one role of providing security to the wife, which traditional society expects the husband to do is something that the emancipated woman revolts. The only thing which these emancipated women can do in a fit of boldness is abuse the man in words which even coarse, illiterate women would not use in public. We have only to recall what Karuna tells Karan when she meets him in the Oberoi Hotel and enquires about her friend Anjali, "Listen Asshole — don't give me your fancy lines. You are nothing but a cheap male whore. Why don't you leave Ritu alone? (SE, p.112) Karuna thinks she got the better of herself as a

RESEARCH ARTICLE

woman by abusing her husband verbally when he actually comes with the proposal to remarry her. "And you waited all this while to tell me. Just get the hell out of my house and life. I don't ever want to see you again. I let you in this time.... but never again I'll call the cops if you try and invade my home in future. You are even more of a warm than I thought.

You deserve Winnie — I hope she's got a wax doll of yours. I'll send her some extra pins to stick into it. Now take your frigging pipe and out!!?" (SE-264) For characters like Anjali, marriage is a social necessity as it not only provides them not only with security, status and luxuries, but it also enables them to commit adultery. It might begin as a possible escape from a 'meaningless marriage' as happens in the case of Karuna's affair with Krish but once it is discovered she is advised against going on a 'guilt-trip' by Anjali. In spite of all these problems and struggles in a woman's personality, *Socialite Evenings* can still be considered a success story. Karuna fights her way up after her divorce, gets recognition in advertising and television productions and becomes financially independent. It is evident that the author seems to approve of the kind of life Karuna has lived, which is crystal clear in the Epilogue which reads:

It has been very hard work, this packaging of her life, and often it had

almost seemed impossible to finish the book. But now that it was over she felt a certain sadness, autumnal in its intensity....she loved this time of the day and she willed herself to relax. Tomorrow's anxieties could be dealt with later, today she would rest (SE, p.307)

Finally, Shobha Dee's *Socialite Evenings* presents the aesthetics of feminism and emancipation of the New Woman.

References:

- Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*, Bidwai, Praful. Heaven Can Wait. The Times of India, 16.Feb, Col.4.
- 2 Chandra PS, Jaiswal AK, Sharma MC, Mahapatra AK. Cerebellar medulloblastoma in a 65-year old Indian male. *Neurol India*\_2000; 48: 178-179. Anushashan Parva, Chapter 21, Verse 19.
- De Shobha, *Socialite Evenings*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1989. Print (All citations in the paper are from this edition of the text, followed by page numbers in parentheses).
- Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak writes in her article "*Can, the Subaltern Speak?* From Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, (Harvest Wheats Heaf, 1994, (P.80)

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

- Mary Wollstonecraft, A Year of Feminist Classics, P.34.
- Nahal, Chaman, “*Feminism in Indian English Fiction*”, Indian Women Novelists ed. by R.K. Dhawan, Prestige Books, New Delhi, 1971, p.30.
- Lodge, D. Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, (London: Longman, 1989).
- 8. Urbashi Barat, ‘Of Girls Abridged and Adapted’, P.121
- [https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/6880/6/06\\_chapter](https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/6880/6/06_chapter)
- <https://www.studypool.com/discuss/7393170/women-studies-4>
- <http://relationship.businessservices.es/>
- <http://www.allresearchjournal.com/archives/2016/vol2issue3/PartE/3-10-111-623.pdf>