

CULTURAL DEVIATION AND CONFLICT ARTICULATED IN SHOBHA DE'S WOMEN CHARACTERS IN 'SOCIALITE EVENINGS'.

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ABSTRACT : *Shobha Rajadhyaksha , well known novelist by the name of Shobha De often kicks away all the values and views of traditional and social mindset by projecting her characters with rebellious mood and revolting outlook in her works. She has enriched the feministic writings in Indian English literature with her unique treatment to women's issues like female sexuality, domestic violence, extra marital affairs, lesbianism, male chauvinism and the like. De glorifies the extra-marital affairs of women as the stroke to break the traditional and moral values in society in her novels. She shows her bold and innovative approach towards the woman's world. In her novels she conceives an image of a new woman who bravely fights with the adversities in her life playing different roles in family. Her women are not weakened and wounded by the deadly shackles of patriarchy and do not wail for their misfortunes in conjugal life. They have power to smash the traditional and typical image of woman and they have a strong hatred towards the patriarchal male dominated culture. This deviation and subversion of social values has been amply discussed, debated and documented in all her novels. Shobha is a gifted novelist with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. The way she narrates each and every aspect of human relationship in general and man-woman relationship in particular, is superb. Shobha differs from other Indian women novelists writing in English. She is a writer who believes in very frank narration of incidents and absolute open-heartedness. Socialite Evenings is a novel that presents the institutions of family and marriage existing in the wealthy class of the Indian society. The present paper is a study of Shobha De's debut novel Socialite Evenings in the light of cultural deviations reflected by different women characters drawn by the novelist from various walks of life. Through this paper an attempt has been made to examine and analyze her women characters in the light of cultural conflict and divergence while adopting modern high society life style in Socialite Evenings.*

Keywords : Culture, extra-marital affair, conflict, cultural values, Vehement, realistic, revolting, deviation, conflict

Introduction :

Indian fiction in English has been enriched by several multi faceted women novelists including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayanatara Sahagal, Attain Hosain, Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De. They have a women perspective on the world. They have written about Indian women, their struggle, their suffering and their awkward position, keeping in view their image and role which the society has created. Their chief contribution consists of their exploring the moral strength of women characters and their struggle with challenges in creating their own identity .Shobha De is a prolific writer born in Maharashtrian Brahmin Family in Mumbai in 1948 and was educated in Delhi and Bombay. All the twelve books which were written by her gained high score and created new records. She writes about the high-flying- upper class society of India. She has dealt with issues related to woman. To project urban culture, she has changed traditional picture of enduring, submissive and self-sacrificing women with a new picture of bold and liberated urban women.

Shobha De, an eminent modern novelist and journalist and an iconoclast , becomes the symbol of highlighting different perspectives of women's freedom and liberation through her writings. Her glorification of extra marital affairs to break the cultural and traditional Indian mindset is one of the most dominating aspects in her novels. Her women characters are daring and courageous in establishing extra- marital affairs to gratify their natural drives. Her intention is to reconstruct the established social theory about woman. In her works, she has advocated rebellious sort of woman ready to revolt against social taboos which compel her to behave as voiceless one and always be subjugated in the clutches of patriarchy. De has portrayed her woman not as a victim but a victor in her novels. Thus Shobha De has occupied a controversial place in literary circle for her bold writings which are not only popular and best sellers in India but also in abroad. The most noticeable aspects of her writings is her vehement approach towards woman's issues and their emotional world. Her entire focus is to present her work more realistic and down to earth. De's works are documented as epitome of her deep rooted reverence expressed for womanhood in the light of various shades of characters portrayed in her novels. Here the readers can feel the clash and rift between cultural values in existing moral codes which are always constructed by the revolting outlook shown by her woman characters. While Shashi Tharoor voices the failure of traditional Indian marriages in his novels , Shobha De vehemently speaks about high class women's sexuality and domestic subordination in her writings.

Cultural Deviations in *Socialite Evenings*:

Shobha De's debut novel *Socialite Evenings* (1989) has a well knit structure which has been intelligently cemented with literary excellence. It is a well crafted novel with a plot and subplot. It's basic theme is a strong protest of women for self assertion and to battle with dominance which has deeper roots in the traditional patriarchy. Like other novels in *Socialite Evenings* also De has presented Karuna and Anjali as liberated working women of defiant, wealthy, ignited with confidence and affirmed for their position in society. These women constitute their own culture The novel is based on such a major plot. Karuna, a desperate housewife the central character progresses with the development of the other characters in a

subplot in which the life of Anjali, a fun loving fashionable woman runs counter parallel which enforces the climax and conflicts in the main plot.

Karuna, the ill fated heroine, is a remarkable Bombay socialite. The novel is totally drawn in form of her memories, detailing her birth in a dusty clinic in Satara. The plot unfolds itself, by making this middle class girl develop into a star along with her friend and mentor Anjali. It indicated her real narrative interest in the metropolis of Bombay and her friend, Anjali. It is her meeting with Anjali that changes her course of life from a boring college girl status to that of modeling star in a social circle far away from her middle class mindset up and background.

The conservative middle class background is ever present in Karuna's response to the pervasive world she inhabits. Karuna eagerly casts off the confining shackles of her modest upbringing to adopt the life style of Anjali and the rich and famous of the metropolis. She subsequently expresses her repulsion at the thought of an ordinary life, "perhaps I just wasn't cut out to be middle class, lower middle class ." (SE, 240) As Karuna rightly says:

" basically I wanted to get out of the closed boring middle class environment of my family. I wasn't interested in studies. I wanted to be on my own independent to see the world, meet people, buy lovely clothes and perfumes. What else does a pretty girl at that age want any way? " (SE, 12)

Karuna believes in the superiority of the rich and famous. She imitates Anjali and moulds herself and takes to designer clothing and famous labels to home interiors as obvious symbol of luxury and success acquired by any individual who embodies Bombay's high life. Karuna detests the empty evenings and the social life that accompanies the marriage, but lacks initiative or influence to change her circumstances. She finally leaves her husband out of sheer boredom without justifying her decision or leveling blame upon him. Karuna dreams of a perfect marriage with laughter, conversation and fun and frolics in life. She seems searching for the 'grand romance' that may ever not exist.

Hence, Karuna has to shoulder different roles at different times to quench her emotional and psychic thirst. She is a model, a housewife a society lady, an actor, writer and a paramour. She has independent thought. She has her own opinions and is free to choose her ways and means. There is no superimposition on her thoughts. Karuna's life filled is with instincts and urges. She unveils and unfurls herself to activate the creative urge lurking within herself and this act of unburdening herself is a compromise with herself. Like Shashi Deshpande, De does not over do by wailing for woman's agonies and anguishes. She transforms them into a creative principle of act and beauty that foster mental strength to her characters. Karuna's expected child creates a crisis in the household as her husband suspects the paternity of the child and this tussle leads to their divorce. Karuna is almost in a state of panic but in this situation too, her whole response and attitude is directed towards herself.

Karuna is an iconoclast and rebellion since her childhood. Her 'adventurous' feats in school and college life imitating her school colleague Charlie shows her revolting outlook and

fortitude against the established social bonds and bondages in an orthodox Brahmin family. She secretly shoots her modeling snaps with Charlie and enjoy smoking, wears high heels and short cuts, throwing away the cultural codes in her family. Her obsession with *Play Boy* to see and experience nudity at any cost shows her boldness and protest against the social taboos.

In this way, Karuna makes a deviation from traditional norms and existing moral codes. She refuses a good life offered by Girish or Ranbir as it is at the cost of her individuality. Karuna's resistance to the idea of second marriage is also significant. She talks rough to prospective husband especially Ranbir. She prefers friendship to permanent exploitation. She refuses to institutionalize her relations with others and thus protests her stereotype with marriage. She is a rebellion from childhood who prefers to live following own codes set by her.

Along with Karuna is a modern independent woman with modern views and values. She is very defiant in her attitude towards dress and manners and her ability to keep herself away from wolfish males and the disdainful expressions of men who maintain a formal safe distance through the day and in the evening take a chance to establish relationship. Her breaking out the shackles of matrimony and traditional mindset and working in profession of her own choice display the revolting shade of her character. She is portrayed as a serious character in the novel.

Unlike Karuna, the other female characters appear to lead far more interesting lives as they freely indulge in sanctifying their sexual urge. Anjali is narrator's friend and mentor. In Anjali, De portrays an apparent independent lady of the metropolis, rich, confident and beautiful. As Karuna says: "when I think about Bombay the person who comes to mind is Anjali and so I shall begin my narrative with her." (SE, 9)

Anjali voices the concept of marriage prevailing in the rich society. Anjali too is not interested in studies and keenly wanted to get out her middle class background. She is a pretty young girl, who joins the Air India as an Air hostess. As De writes "she was still stunning to look at in her mid forties. Not classically beautiful, not flashy like a movie-star but straight of back and firm of shoulders." (SE, 9) She manages to look Abe, a rich man, "an experienced rake with a wild reputation." (SE, Anjali looks towards life as an inventory of consumer goods where even a proposed husband is measured by his wealth. Her house is covered and adored by mirrors and a bar, which appears to be extravagant and disgraceful imitation of Hollywood film set.

In Anjali's circle everyone is thrice married and divorce is casual among them. This explains status of Anjali's conjugal life. Anjali has dual religious identity as the half Jain and half Hindu girl. She shows her adherence to twin religious cultures. She is treated like a baby who enjoys the feeling of indulgence but the vital area of difference between Anjali and Abe was the 'Mussulman part'. Anjali continues to wear a *Bindi* when she wears *sari* and celebrates *Diwali* at home which results in their divorce. Marriage does not put any restraint on the extramarital relationship of Abe and Anjali. After the death of her father she realizes that her mother is not pleased to see her as divorced daughter. Anjali is in lookout for a catch to marry.

She tells Karuna that she would grab a rich person is exceedingly rich. Abe promptly divorces his second wife to tie a wedlock with Anjali, a women perpetually on heat. She gets sandwiched with a husband like Kumar who is a gay. Anjali's escaping idea from having children can also be traced in her advice to Karuna when she enforces:

Don't be crazy. A baby is a lifelong responsibility look at Mimi. Are you prepared to tie yourself down forever ? Get a pet 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 (SE ,22)

Marriage is a necessity for women like Anjali because it provides them not only security, status and luxuries but also awards them a license to indulge in infidelity that is possible only within marriage. Anjali's stormy sexual affairs have horrifying impact on her daughter Mimi, who withdraws herself from the society, family and finds solace in drugs. She highly addicts to drugs and make desperate attempts to find a temporary escape to her mental troubles, tortures and torments.

CONCLUSION :

Speaking in a nutshell, Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* speaks of volumes about the clash of the values, the friction between Indian traditional approach and modern way of living in case of Karuna , Anjali and other subsequent characters. The novel is not only a model of literary expression but it is a biting satire and serious comment made on social institutions questioning for existing social values and moral codes. According to R.S.Pathak De's treatment of the "contemporary Indian women's challenges, predicament, values and life style is surely not without significance."(Pathak, 69)

Both the heroines of the novel, Karuna and Anjali are not ready to obey the superficial social bonds and bondages ,which are made by man for woman. In this novel ,like her other fictions her women are bold, straightforward and daring to indulge in infidelity or to have extra marital links to overcome their mental fatigue. Thus *Socialite Evenings* becomes a story of two high class beautiful young women who like to live a life of their own which does not restrict them to tiptoe all social rules. They set up their own rules and moral codes and constitute their own culture.

Over all , the characters, the situations, the incidents, the attitudes, the setting and the plot of the novel reflect the tussle and deviations between different cultures and established social values and it becomes the main thrust of the novel *Socialite Evenings*.

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