

Chapter II

***Socialite Evenings*-A Prototype of Resistance Culture**

Depiction of women characters portrayed in literature is as varied as the authors who create them. Women protagonists have represented an incessant assortment of roles throughout literary history. Whether women are represented as victim or victimizer it is obvious that women characters have been stereotyped for centuries. Shobha De as well as many other women authors has defied this tendency. Her protagonists do not fit into traditional roles established by the society. De's heroines are a mixture of submissiveness and authority. De's women protagonists are unique in many ways and display myriad shades of personality; a common trait is that they rebel against the oppressive cultural constraints.

The term rebellion does not involve negative activity of resistance. It is indeed a positive way to affirm dignity, justice and liberation. Women's issues have been enunciated by women writers with more enthusiasm in a bid to support the cause of women's liberation.

Women who conform to the existing moral ethics and code and social norms, especially with regard to their relationship with men and reactions to familial frictions, are certainly traditionalists. Those who defy traditions and opt for modernity are non-conformists. Conformity to a pattern does not mean dumb acceptance of all that is thrust on them. It takes for granted a certain degree of willingness and whole-hearted acceptance. Conformists hold on to the set of traditional values! Sometimes, even at the cost of individual happiness. A tradition abiding woman even sacrifices her happiness for the well

being of the family, but at the same time retains her individuality. (Bai 35)

Patriarchy, the hallmark of Indian culture is losing its strong hold. In this rapidly altering world, the role of women in society is changing fast, which in general affects the social norms prevalent in the society. Shobha De does not believe in depicting her women characters as slaves or just helpmates at home but as empowered women.

Women as writers have the added responsibility of providing role models for society in general. Through their writings they have reinterpreted old myths to reassert their position of gender equality. They have the authority of questioning the validity of those traditions and practices that have circumscribed women into narrow slots of domestic responsibilities. The writer can also challenge the superiority of men in social hierarchy which has subordinated women for centuries. Women have to subdue their egoistic self pride and manoeuvre to prove their mettle within the given system.

Feminism and the struggle related to women liberation has taught the proponents of feminism to believe that they are potent and powerful agencies of change, a change that they have come to understand that it cannot and will not be brought about either by overt revolt or by self-sacrificing martyrdom, the change can be brought only when women are recognized as individuals in their own right. The concept of power and resistance is an integral part of postfeminism. But before grappling the authority into their hands and realizing their own strength and power, women have an important obstacle to cross and that is their belief that they are prone to victimization or a belief that they are

victims. “Women who flaunt victim status...have made themselves impervious to the power actually available to them” (Genz 68).

India is a country where there are innumerable sects, and treatment of women in each quarter is different. Though male chauvinism is accepted in many traditions, women in India still dangle between the given traditional norms and a desire to achieve success in the economic and social front. However the importance of freedom to decide their fortune, economic independence and the information about their privileges has reached the ears of many and a few have accepted themselves to the change.

It can be believed that the male hegemony is no longer acceptable at least in the urban sector of the Indian society as women have started asserting their individuality. But still majority of women are not in a position to make choices and accept patriarchy. Shobha De’s protagonists are not subservient victims. At some point in the novel they raise from their initial victim position to protest and establish their wants. According to Sarah Grimke the cause of such a protest or rebellion of women lies in the atrocities committed by men against women in the past years.

Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish qualification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrument in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind. (10)

The suffering and subjugation of women over a long period of time has made them resistant to atrocities. So in due course of time this form of resistance turned into rebellious behavior. The women of the present day do not find any purpose in being acquiescent. Women with a tinge of rebelliousness in their personality attempt to fight

their way against all odds in order to fulfill their aspirations. They rebel against the existing moral codes and social norms which either in theory or in practice tends to relegate women to a secondary position in the society.

The principle of postfeminism is to discourage any form of notion that portray women in question as meek and subjugated. Postfeminism evidently disapproves any form of feminism that considers women as victims. Naomi Wolf claims:

Victim feminism is obsolete and even harmful to the feminist cause... this feminism has slowed women's progress, impeded their self-knowledge, and been responsible for most of the inconsistent, negative, even chauvinistic spots of regressive thinking that are alienating many women and men. (147)

This form of submissive, victimizing and self-pity prone feminism should be replaced by another form of feminism which advocates power and strength. Naomi Wolf introduced the term 'power feminism' as opposed to the victim feminism. Power feminism is an aspect of postfeminism. Power feminism focuses on strong women who strive towards empowerment rather than brooding over their past abrasion.

Shobha De destroys this distorted and deteriorated image of women and therefore, the women characters in her novels appear more powerful than men. The society is used to seeing women in victim position. These images are inculcated in the hearts of the people by the influence of the patriarchally dominated society, so any violation in this process is considered outrageous and unaccepted. A powerful woman is seen as a threat to the society. Shobha De breaks the stereotypical forms of writing by consciously indulging in portraying women who cannot be circumscribed within the framework of victimized women.

Shobha De is one of the contemporary women writer who is very sympathetic towards women and their problems. Being a professional Journalist she had the opportunity to meet women from various walks of life and thus she looks at women related problem quite differently. Shobha De's main concern in writing novels is to discuss women related issues including identity crisis, gender conflict, marriage and psychological trauma.

Postfeminist does not fight for or plead for equality, instead of viewing themselves as victims they observe themselves as individuals, not evaluating them on par with men. The term postfeminism was used to signify a "new story, complete with a younger generation who supposedly reviled the women's movement" (Faludi xix), and cultural theorist Angela McRobbie argues that post-feminism "positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force" (59).

Though Shobha De's protagonists are educated, urban and belong to the high strata of society yet they are not free from patriarchal domination. But these women resist all forms of atrocity placed against them and they focus on their self-development. Though they have high aptitude for creating an identity as a professional but in the domestic sphere men devalue their willpower. Shobha De reacts against the patriarchal culture and strongly detests marginalization of women. She does not approve of depicting women as slaves or as women confined to the domestic sphere dependent on men economically.

Cris Mazza describes such writing as the products of new women authors whose styles and perspectives reveal a confidence to "...honestly assess and define themselves without having to live up to standards imposed by either a persistent

patriarchal world or the old feminist insistence that female characters achieve self-empowerment” (104-5). In her novels male ascendancy is no longer acceptable. Shobha De believes that “Men just feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient women” (SE 47) and so she shatters the imprecise and depreciating image of women therefore, the women characters in her novels appear more powerful than men.

Though Shobha De applies postfeminist ideas in her novel, De is aware of the realities of Indian social context. As postfeminism is an extension of Feminism and resistance culture and rebellion becomes the characteristics of postfeminism. David Tetzlaff in his essay “Popular Culture and Social Control in Late Capitalism” has discussed this aspect of resistance-culture. Tetzlaff argues that an individualistic rebellion is constantly validated. These rebellions merge into a totalizing movement. Shobha De’s protagonists are lone-rebel motifs and thus they are the validation of individualistic rebellion against the system.

The lone rebel is a person whose relations with other people, society and culture are characterized first of all by their autonomy. They are independent as they make their decisions for themselves, without having to rely on the opinions of others, or on the rules, conventions and values imposed by society. They like solitude and detachment, and emphasize their need for privacy and independence. Their perception on the world is detached from any particular culture, society or religion in which they live and they do not believe in age old conventions set up by the society, though they will ostensibly show their reverence to them. The people who belong to the category of the lone rebel are people with great interpersonal skills, they make superfluous relationship easily. They are selfish in nature and they choose only those people from whom they will get any assured benefit in the future. These types of people are characterized by extreme sincerity, self-

disclosure and intimacy, by the dropping of all defense mechanisms. They are quite uninhibited about sex, their behavior might resemble sado-masochism, but they are in no way obsessed by it, and will in general not look for sex without affection.

Shobha De's women face subjugation initially and eventually establish victory over the situation and their resistance is heroic and commendable. *Socialite Evenings*, depicts the tainted images of Indian women who are the victims of subjugation, subordination and marginalization at the hands of their husbands. Shobha De in her writings does not make a generalized attack on men in particular, instead she questions the systems that promotes subjugation of women and encourages it. Shobha De's women are bold, rebellious and face the predicament that destiny thrusts upon them with challenging sprit. They protest against being exploited by the society and strive to assert their identity.

Socialite Evenings, discusses the story of Karuna, a prominent Bombay socialite, who escapes the nightmares of a broken marriage, failed relationships and a mentally disturbed sister and finally achieves a respectable position in the society. Initially Karuna works as a model then resorts to writing and later starts an advertisement production company. She meets all sorts of people as her profession emphasis interpersonal relationships and she learns a lot about the tangles and tussles common in human relationships. As the novel progresses it becomes clear that Karuna has been entangled in a meaningless marriage. The relationship between Karuna and her husband is devoid of affection, it is strange and mechanical. Soon she realized that her marriage is a failure because she had chosen a wrong person.

Shobha De presents her protagonists as self-confident and potential woman who strives to get total freedom and to change the stereotypical conceptualization of women. She shows her faith in the power of women. Karuna is a representative of

‘New Women’ who are confident and look forward hopefully for a satisfied independent 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. As a modern Indian educated married woman she emerges with her new identity and changes her image.

Karuna, the protagonist of the novel *Socialite Evenings* belongs to a middle class family, but the glamorous atmosphere of Mumbai makes her feel ashamed of her origin and she makes an effort to duplicate the rich, famous and the glammers. She intentionally wears the mask of artificiality to fit into the high society. She leaves middle class values and conventional moral standards and embraces the high life of the rich upper class. Even while in school, Karuna feels appallingly resentful about her “middle class origins and the shabbiness of her life as the daughter of a middle-rung government official” (SE 10).

De’s heroines soar above the patriarchal limits by asserting their rights regarding their sexuality. Karuna plunges into the ultra modern world of fashion and glamour which is introduced to her by Anjali, a prominent socialite in Bombay. The glitz and glamour of the luxurious world attracts her and her main focus in life is to achieve and lead a higher lifestyle, far away from paucity. She is strongly attracted to the popular Mumbai cosmopolitan culture, her sturdy desire to become fashionable, famous and rich makes her rebel against her father and she selects modeling as her profession defying her parent’s opposition. The modeling career which she pursues much against her father’s wishes is the first step she takes to become a part of the glamour world.

Karuna meets a prominent socialite Anjali who acts as a passport to the big world of fashion and advertising. “Anjali with her satiny polished nails, French

perfume and the silver grey Impala were enough to make a stunning impact on the gauche mind of Karuna”(Shukla 224). Anjali was born in a conservative family, to escape the boredom of middle class monotonous life, she marries Abbas Tyabji in anticipation of money and high societal sophisticated lifestyle.

Anjali’s fancy house in Malabar Hill which later became a regular visiting place for Karuna was just a “...gaudy and cheap imitation of a third-rate Hollywood film set that impressed the young girl as the height of fashionable living; the mirrors, the bar with the naughty sticker...”(Shukla 225). In Anjali’s house Karuna met Si who was an outrageous woman with false lash, heavy makeup and wig on her head. She blatantly claimed that Karuna should be introduced to Abbas Tyabji.

Her meeting with Anjali, a prominent socialite and the wife of a wealthy playboy, makes Karuna’s entry into the high society easier. Karuna marries for money, little considering her incompatibility with her husband. Later she finds that she has made a mistake in choosing her husband because the man turns out to be unexciting and uninspiring. However, when she becomes pregnant and the legitimacy of the child is doubted by her husband, it gives birth to a major crisis in her life which proves a turning point in her life. She is filled with righteous indignation and revolts against her husband. Karuna decides to abort the foetus and Anjali provides the much needed moral support and advice. Karuna’s father scorns and rebuffs her and tells her to pay the price of her own doings. Thus the patriarchal social set up tries to impinge upon her a demoralizing and depressing attitude. This crisis helps karuna become more determined to face the challenges of life.

Compared with the outgoing and fun loving Karuna, her husband proves a dull partner. Impelled by her desire for fun and excitement, she cheats her husband and plans for a holiday with her lover Krish: “While he was innocently instructing me, I

was already planning, when and how I'd meet Krish. At the airport? Hotel? What we'd do together- how liberated and free we'd feel without any pressures on us" (SE 128).

While Shobha De offers fashion, modeling and glamour as backdrops, it is of course a decidedly contemporary genre which attempts to idolize the postfeminist image of bad girl. Most feminists are against all the characteristics that the bad girls advocate, especially sex and general outrageous badness. In contrast to the strident, earnest feminist, the postfeminist propagates apathethy and independence.

Casting women as sexually pure and mystically nurturing, victim feminism stresses the evil done to these good women as a way of petition for their rights. . . . Countering notions of female collective victimization, power feminism sees women as human beings- sexual, individual, no better or worse than their male counterparts- and lays claim to equality simply because women are entitled to it. (Genz 68-69)

Karuna strongly believes that associating herself with the elite society would bring wealth, fame, freedom and status that will fulfill her desires of achievement. Karuna priorities her professional career than her family and personal life. But to adjust to the changing scenario and the modes of thought and way of living, Karuna, later on gets married to a rich young man. After realizing her status as a dependent doll, Karuna, feels humiliated and considered that she wasn't eligible to be a mere domestic subservient wife. So she opted to break the marital bond and to establish her own identity. The absence of feeling and concern for each other between the life partners is expressed by Karuna as:

We would lie there in the bedroom with the dull walls reading our respective magazines. He with *The Economist* and I with a film rag. If there was absolutely nothing better to do and we ran out of magazines, he would turn to me and nudge, ‘Wife-how about it?’ Neither the words nor the tone did anything to allay the disgust I usually felt. But it was simpler to just get on with the damn thing and have it over and done with as fast as possible. I would lie there staring at the ceiling as he pounded away. Or sometimes I would mentally review the day’s accounts. I can never remember my thoughts being anything other than unedifying. (SE 59)

There is absolutely no understanding and love in her marriage. The vacuum in marital relationship is beyond acceptance for any women in the long run. Like other contemporary Indian women writers, Shobha De explores and exposes the prominent patriarchal premises and prejudices embedded in Indian culture and life style. In a variety of ways she challenges the ideology of gender which justifies and naturalises the inequitable divisions between male and female. She raises her voice in her novels for “an egalitarian society which would uphold the rights of each individual to fulfil their potential” (Gamble 264).

De’s own approach to gender debates often allows her to restructure her own works which is meant to both celebrate and interrogate subjects like love, courtship and marriage, and the desire to have both love and independence. Thus in an act of insurgence Karuna indulges in adulterous relationship, and forces her husband either to tolerate or ignore it. Her illicit relationship is an outcome of vengeance and the piled up frustration caused to her by her husband. She openly accepts her deviant behaviour and challenges her husband. She clearly tells her husband that he has failed

to understand her as a human and this is the real cause of her indifference towards him. Even she goes a step further by legally separating from her husband. She decided to lead a single life because she wanted to assert her individuality. Karuna's struggle inside her marriage is not an isolated one when compared to the real sufferings of women in the society. Karuna's story is the representation of all the women who strive hard to attain a dignified life.

Lack of communication and emotional attachment between Karuna and her husband makes her life weary. Initially Karuna adheres to the pre-set social norms and tries to be a well-trained Indian wife who is obedient and submissive to her husband. But in spite of this she is humiliated by her husband which highlights her sad plight. He says:

You don't deserve me and my family. My mother had told me at the very beginning – "Find out more about this girl and her family. Are they like us? Will they fit in? Will she?" and I had given her a guarantee that you would be OK. How wrong I was and how right she had been! (SE 178)

Thus as a wife Karuna serves the perfect example of a miserable Indian woman. She is frustrated due to her sterile marital life and marginalization as she is secluded within the house. Referring to the non-responsive attitude of husbands, Shobha De points out that they are not evil men, but what they do to their wives is beyond evil. In *Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir describes the pitiable situation of women who are trapped in various conditions follows: "Half way between revolt and slavery, she resigns reluctantly to masculine authority" (623). Karuna hates the callous attitude of her husband and the unbearable condition which she is subjected to. She says:

We were reduced to being marginal people. 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 heads and four square meals a day. (SE 61)

Karuna’s pathetic utterance evinces the plight of the marginalized Indian women as their world is supposed to be restricted to their domestic limits. Karuna recalled her mother’s words that marriage is merely a question of getting used to the change.

Karuna realises:

Most of the women I knew concurred with this viewpoint. We treated marriage like a skin allergy – an irritant all right, but not something that would totally incapacitate us. We had our own secret lives – and by that I do not mean clandestine affairs. But these were our private worlds, inaccessible to the man we had married. (SE 46)

Karuna is able to recognize how Indian women are made to listen and tolerate insulting remarks or comments of men and are denied the right to realize their potentials. She recalls the bitter experience of her friend, a qualified surgeon who was deliberately humiliated by her husband. He was of the opinion that she married him for money. Karuna’s husband may not be cruel by nature but he silently imposes his domination on her and tries to subjugate her. Karuna’s friend’s suffering is evident from the following statement:

He brainwashes me constantly. I am made to feel obliged and in debt. It is 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 am stuck. (SE 61)

Though women like Karuna visualizes marriage as a resolution to their problems and

a way to fulfill their aspirations but in reality marriage smashes all their dreams and hope and they suffer despondently within their matrimony.

According to Shobha De, the Indian male rarely fulfils the requisites of a proper husband. In this patriarchal social set up woman is reduced to a mere object. Karuna's husband does not treat her as his partner; instead he views her as an object of satisfying his personal will. As a result there is a complete loss of her identity. In an attempt and a quest to fulfil her emotional and psychological needs, Karuna develops an extra-marital relationship with Krish, an old friend of her husband. Karuna's husband doubts this relationship which finally results in a divorce.

In the beginning, Karuna tries to adjust and make compromise to save her marriage. But her open rebellion comes forth when she admits her extra-marital relations to her husband. She tells her husband forthrightly:

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. May be he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant me. ... You know by now that I am not the flighty sort. I don't flirt at random like my other friends. I am steady and grounded.

It is the Taurean in me that is surfacing these days. Treat this as a short-term mania that will wear itself out – and then we can go back to business as usual. (SE 178)

After her divorce, her husband meets her to express his regret and coerces her to come back and live with him. He is prompted to visit her by the typical patriarchal understanding and expectation regarding women's response in such situations. It is traditionally believed that eventually a woman will ignore the cruelties of her husband as she thinks he has certain privileges over her. But Karuna's response is shocking

and unexpected because she firmly asks her husband to go away. It is a powerful jolt to the patriarchal mind set of her husband. She verbally abuses her husband when he 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 will call the cops if you try and invade my house in future. You are even more of a worm than I thought. ...Now take your frigging pipe and OUT!!’ (SE 256-57) Soon after their divorce Karuna’s husband is into a live-in relationship with Winnie but Karuna stays single and firmly avoids any man in her life.

But just before their separation, through the pretensive act of forgiveness, her husband tries to assert his male superiority. He sarcastically threatens Karuna :

I have thought over the whole thing carefully. I would have thrown you right now – but I am prepared to give you one more chance. I am not a mean man. You have been a good wife. I don’t really have any major complaints against you. I am prepared to cancel this one black mark on your performance record and start with a clean slate. But you have to swear you will never see or keep in touch with that man again. I think I am being more than fair. No other husband would have reacted like this- but I said to myself, you are human, you have sinned, but I must be generous and forgive you. (SE 176)

All pervading patriarchal ideologies distort women's view of their true conditions of existence. They are tempted and encouraged to accept artificial and man-made gender roles and rules as natural and desirable. They are conditioned to such a degree that they themselves transmit these sexist ideologies to younger generations as inviolable rules of social welfare and peaceful life. Hence any attempt

at the inversion of roles and goals of male and female is vehemently resisted and restricted in a phallogocentric system. In such a context, a women writer is double-burdened; first to make women aware of their own unfair conditions of living and then invest them with powerful weapons to fight against pervading patriarchal ideology. The condition of Karuna's two sisters, Swati and Alak, is not better. Swati is an engineer, whose husband has taken a mistress and divorced her. Karuna's mother is very subservient in nature. She does not raise her voice in support of her daughters. Like Karuna, they also pass through similar traumatic experiences. Simone De Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born a woman, but becomes one" (295), draws attention at the difference between biological sex and gender; this distinction can be used to explore the ways in which women have historically been oppressed in a male world. Women are victims of patriarchal social system. The novelist demonstrates sexual harassment faced by women at the hands of men through various instances in the novel.

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 for the second time for a secured life, she replied that she was at peace with herself minding her business.

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. (SE 276)

Thus through her denial of another marriage, Karuna reveals her protest against the traditional social system which prioritizes marital status to be indispensable for women. She emerges as a rebellious person who is conscious about her freedom and right. She is self-reliant and recognizes herself better as an independent and matured individual. She also establishes herself economically with the help of Anjali and is able to lead a dignified life and takes care of her parents. She says firmly: "I feel confident now that I can look after myself. I am earning as much as any man. I have a roof over my head...I am at peace with myself" (SE 276). She is no more a weaker and docile woman but a dynamic and determined woman. She is now totally a changed and experienced woman. In fact "through her self-recognition and self-awareness as a mature, and an experienced person, she establishes herself in the highly competitive world and becomes emotionally and financially independent" (Singh R A 220).

By rejecting the rules of patriarchy Karuna achieves the elation and contentment of an amiable life. Through Karuna, De presents the picture of an emancipated woman whose financial independence gives way to social independence and personal freedom. Anjali and Ritu are the minor women characters who are friends of Karuna. They are presented as flat and stereotypes responsible for their own plight. They belong to the rich upper class but still suffer from patriarchy. The male-dominated social context is, to a great extent, responsible for their condition. Anjali and Ritu do not have the awareness that having an identity of their own is an important aspect of existence. The only identities allowed to them are that of mothers or wives. Ritu, for example, is reduced to a sheer insignificant object by cunning men who always looked at her as a mere object to fulfil their desires. The following dialogue of Ritu clearly reveals her oppression, exploitation and subjugation by her

husband.

He came at me like a maniac. First he pulled out his leather belt from the trouser and then he stood over me with his eyes blazing. Phatak! – I felt the leather on my arm, and I was so stunned I couldn't even scream. Before I could open my mouth, it landed on my arm again. I lost my balance – I was sitting on the edge of the carpet. He was still standing at the same spot with his arms raised. Suddenly I felt a sharp kick in my side. And another one. Then I heard him say “Shit! There goes my Bally shoe”. Then he threw his belt away and started to slap me around. One hard hit cracked against my nose. – my nose was like a geyser with blood gushing from it. (SE 121)

At one point in life Ritu gets frustrated with her marriage and files a divorce and then she seeks love outside marriage and marries Gul, who is an underworld don. She is so much dependent on his mercy and promises to supply other women for his pleasure. As Ritu is financially dependent on Gul, he treats her malevolently. He humiliates her publicly. For instance, in one of the parties when Ritu picks a quarrel with a starlet named Sonia, it is Gul who beats Ritu in public. Anjali describes the incident to Karuna thus :

Gul got into a fight with Ritu and struck her straight on the face. He also called her some filthy names – in Hindi. And do you know something? Nobody dared interfere. She just lay there on the ground while he kicked her, yanked her hair, spat on her and tore her blouse. (SE 212)

Anjali, a young socialite woman in the novel, also suffers much due to her incompatible marriage and her husband's oppressive attitude. While working as an air

hostess in Air India, Anjali marries Abbas Tyabji often addresses as Abe. Abe's unfaithfulness and an attitude of indifference destroyed her happiness. In one of the meetings, Anjali tells Karuna that she cuts her nails because her husband does not like her long nails. Thus she has to conform to her husband's wishes. Consequently, there is a complete loss of her identity, individuality and freedom. Later on, when she gets divorce from Abe, she gets into relationship with various men, as a sort of self-inflicted pain to overcome her depression. Finally, she marries Kumar Bhandari, he is a homo-sexual and has relations with Murty and other young boys. She gets betrayed by men and thus turns to religion as a means of self-realization and inner peace.

The conjugal lives of Anjali, Ritu and Karuna exemplify that dominance in marriage overpowers and enslave women. Women eventually fall as a victim to such abusive marriages sometimes because of their financial dependence and sometimes because of the emotional dependence. For instance, Anjali's fascination for men is twofold: physical beauty and wealth. Gul, the smuggler and underworld don, practically traps Ritu. Such attachments and dependence on the part of women makes men to subjugate them easily. These marginalized women lack the characteristics of rebellious Karuna such as self-confidence, independence of spirit, clarity of thought, moral courage and emotional stability. Shobha De is frank and straightforward in depicting the suffering of women in her novels.

Women should grasp authority from men and embrace their own power; women have one important obstacle to overcome, which is their belief in their own victimization. Biologically sex is not completely detached from gender, but it cannot be the only factor to explain womanhood and the societal expectations of what it means to be a woman. Beauvoir also stresses that "it is natural for the female human being to make herself a feminine woman" (428). Since women become the gender

they have been forced into, Beauvoir engages in a structuralist way of interpreting an individual not by his or her personality, but by the social condition he or she represents.

The dominant culture sees female sexuality as an audacious component to men; whether a woman is seducing a man or rejecting him, her sexuality has the power to emasculate him. Shelia Ruth, author of *Issues in Feminism*, says,

...the images of women in our culture are fraught with contradictions” and reminds us that “ambivalence toward a whole range of real and alleged female powers (birth, menstruation, seduction, intuition) expresses itself in a subliminal patriarchal belief that women have a great deal of ‘big magic,’ very much worth having but destined to go awry if not controlled and subdued. (107)

In patriarchal culture, women are frequently punished for expressing or acting in accordance with their own wishes. Shobha De’s protagonists also suffer due to such cultural constructs.

All the women characters portrayed in *Socialite Evenings* are smart and poised. They are very well conscious of their strengths and weakness. These women are very talented to project their strength in front of the society by covering up their weakness and turning their weaknesses into strength. They enjoy and are privileged to be the part of the elite circle.

Though the women protagonists of Shobha De face difficulties, sufferings, hardship and obstacles primarily yet they do not forego their ambition and vision for life. They are highly individualistic and adamant in nature when it comes to their self-development. The predicament of Karuna began when she shed off her middle class mentality and went against the wishes of her parents to become a model. After facing a

failed marriage and after going through affairs with men, she gets to know the psychology of men in depth. She realizes the importance of determining her own priorities even though it creates problems for her. On her own part she tries to be accommodating and understanding which is quite typical in an Indian woman despite her modernity.

Karuna realizes that male dominance in a patriarchal society occurs due to two reasons namely due to the passivity and economic dependence of women on men for shelter, support and security, who becomes a target of slander and abuse. Marriage subjugates and enslaves a woman who becomes a plaything in the hands of her husband. He bullies, criticizes and even beats her which crushes her self-confidence and courage. As a daughter and later as a wife Karuna has a suffocating experience of male dominance. She decides to become a free-lance writer and give expression to her creativity and turns her subjective experience into art. She turns down Girish Sridhar's marriage offer despite the fact that he is a reputed art film maker. Despite her rejection of his offer Karuna becomes an object of ridicule and slander in the columns of print media. Her mother attributes her predicament to her unmarried status which invites all sorts of slander and rumour-mongering.

Media plays a vital role in presenting the image of women. Women who are submissive and who silently bear all the atrocity meted upon them are portrayed as good. Empowered women who decide their future course of action successfully are shown as being scheming and cunning. In her essay, "Women in Film Noir," Janey Place examines how visual media portray female sexuality.

women are defined in *relation* to men, and the centrality of sexuality in this definition is a key to understanding the position of women in our culture.... the primary crime the 'liberated' woman is guilty of is

refusing to be defined in such a way, and this refusal can be perversely seen (in art, or in life) as an attack on men's very existence. (35)

Janey Place comments thus: "our popular culture functions as myth for our society: it both expresses and reproduces the ideologies necessary to the existence of the social structure" (35). She explains that "the myth of the sexually aggressive woman (or criminal man) first allows sensuous expression of that idea and then destroys it. And by its limited expression, ending in defeat, that unacceptable element is controlled" (36). A woman is allowed to play out the role of a liberated, sexually active person on screen, but depicting her downfall—showing that her aggression isn't a good idea—insures that it won't happen in real life: "It is clear that men need to control women's sexuality in order not to be destroyed by it" (Place 36). Thus media enforces the ideology that women who do not conform to social norms are ostracized thus cautioning women about the consequences that would happen in real life if women are liberated from male dominance.

In *Socialite Evenings* the main women characters are adventurous in nature and thus go in search of fame, luxury, sexual and emotional satisfaction. The novels of Shobha De replicate materialism that is so prominent in postfeminist representations which also celebrate women by granting and representing sexuality and liberation. Karuna of *Socialite Evenings* recognize her potential by rising above the trivial considerations for money and material success.

Writing a book...brings her sense of achievement and self worth.

Unhappy marriage resulting in divorce and subsequent disappointing experience leave her exhausted. However, all these experiences bring sobriety and sensibility which enables her to actualize herself by living

the life on her own terms and rejecting the established male domination. (Vats 41)

Karuna completely comes out of her past transgression and decides to stay single with no interest in any form of extravagant indulgences.

Karuna decides to write a book on the request of her friend Ranbir. The book is focused on the status of urban Indian woman with Karuna herself as the central character. Karuna uses her creative writing as a means to express her realization of life. Such an experience brings insight and gives a feeling of richness, unsoiledness, unity and tranquility.

Socialite Evenings presents a world which is full of absurdities where genuine human communication and co-existence seems impossible. Many people lead a false life; give a false smile while meeting people and they cheat themselves. Having gone through a series of unpleasant events in life, Karuna becomes aware of the absurdities and meaninglessness of life. This awakening provides Karuna the strength to take responsibilities of her life. This new form of realization brings a sense of completeness in her. Ritu rejects the idea of being rational and tutors Karuna the art of pretending.

What do you all day- just sit in this room and think and think and think? Where does it get you? Be like me –*pretend* . Call your husband ‘darling’, at least in front of his friends. Pamper him in public. Press his feet sometimes. All this work like jaadu (magic). But you are useless, yaar. You think too much. A woman who thinks is not good for a man. Look at me. I hardly ever think – and there’s nothing wrong with my life. I’m happy, Yaar and you’re not. (SE 79)

By pretending and pleasing others women tend to kill individualization and self-realization becomes impossible at such a circumstance.

Karuna's character portrayal reflects her longing to initiate and regulate her life on her own. Contrast to weak and submissive traditional Indian woman, she is strong, courageous enough to get emancipated from orthodox role of women. She does not need the protection of a male partner in her day-to-day routine. Right from her childhood she is above the limiting restrictions of an individual family. She is capable and strong enough to face any adverse situation. For instance, when her husband wants to break up their marriage, she is pregnant but she is not disheartened at all. Instead, she talks to her friend Anjali about the issue. They discuss the subject thoroughly related to getting rid of the child as early as possible so that Karuna once again would become free to lead her life the way she wants. Thus she intends to move out of her wedlock and make a life for herself. She no longer needs her husband's attention. She keeps herself very cleverly at a safe distance from wolfish males such as Abe and Gul. Besides this, as a freethinking and unbound person, she rejects the marriage proposal offered by Girish and also remains unaffected by Varun's threats. Varun's association with politicians, journalists and underworld could not make her waver from the path she has chosen.

As a matter of fact, Shobha De's women easily outplay their male counterparts. The men are subdued and threatened by the self-assured and self-reliant women. Her women rebel against the traditional image of Indian women, whatever may be the field familial or social. R. K. Sinha opines that Shobha De "presents the confident, enterprising, ambitious, and individualistic new woman who demands attention, equality and peace; not on compromising terms but on terms at par with man..." (15).

Karuna's husband is emotionally defeated and finally begs her to come back to him even after their divorce and in spite of her extra-marital relationship with his friend, Krish. He pleaded her to stop her affair with Krish. It is he who begs her to be his wife again, after the divorce. But he is heartlessly rejected by Karuna as a token of revenge for all his wrong doings to her in the marriage. He was unaffectionate, mean and cold towards her during their nuptial days. After Karuna moved out of his house, he had phoned and offered her the following great package of help.

Look – let us be civil about this. I have thought over it, and there is no reason to sulk or accuse. My lawyers will be in touch with you next week. We have worked out a package. You can have your jewellery and all other personal belongings. In fact, come and pick them up any time you want to. We will figure out where you can live. I have identified a flat in Juhu – nothing grand. But you will like it My tax consultant is looking into a monthly maintenance scheme. You have your insurance policy, of course, and the income from shares and the other investments we made jointly. ... Oh – do you need any money? How are you for cash? Is your cheque book with you? I will send some money across tomorrow. (SE 213-214)

Karuna who is independent in every way breaks the bonds of marriage and lands her feet firm in the professional realm of modeling and freelancing. She establishes herself in the highly competitive world and becomes emotionally and financially independent. But Karuna's husband did not keep his promise, instead cheated her of the money he had promised her while getting the divorce papers signed by her.

Shobha De presents a realistic portrayal of women in her novels. Her

protagonists are strong in character and bold as well as intellectually and emotionally matured to make decisions to survive in the patriarchal society. Moreover, De's women are sexually liberated and are free thinkers. They can easily balance between worldly pleasure, materialistic advantages, career and personal life including a family and marriage. Therefore De's women are a fine concoction of every goodness and they seem to be perfect and fearless counterparts to men. Shobha De depicts the life and behaviour of the modern rich people, particularly women in socialite circles. Shobha De deals with the life of the elite social cader as well as women from glamour industry. These highly ultra-modern women lead luxurious and glamorous life. They are economically independent and free from social and moral restrictions. Metaphorically speaking, the sexual taboos tumble like a pack of cards in the life of Shobha De's characters.

Karuna's portrayal reflects her longing to initiate and regulate her life on her own. Right from her childhood she is above the limiting restrictions of an individual by the family members. She is competent and strong enough to face any unsympathetic circumstances. Anjali too realizes the meaninglessness of life and her previous indulgences in delinquency. She throws away all her previous unhealthy lifestyle and gains maturity and sobriety which are reflected in her unwavering devotion to Lord Krishna. Anjali undergoes a complete transformation by forsaking worldly pleasures in favour of spirituality.

What is sex compared to religion? Nothing! The ecstasy I experience when I'm praying or listening to my bhajans is far better than an orgasm. I'm into this totally, and sex has become irrelevant. In fact, I hate to use the sort of language we used to – you know-fuck-shuk and

all that. I feel impure. I go and gargle immediately if these words come out by mistake. (SE 132)

Ritu too feels disillusioned at the end and leaves the company of Gul. She comes to term with her situation and realizes her own self worth. She decides to settle down in a small village near Mussoorie and be under the influence of Mother Nature. The novel ends with a sense of accomplishment where the gloom of the past is left behind forever.

Shobha De projects incompatible marriages, traditional norms of behaviour and patriarchal social system as the real forces of the oppression of women in her fictional world. Shobha De concentrates on developing women characters who are comparatively much more free from moral and social restrictions than the ordinary, submissive and docile women. These characters do not represent the common lot of women but their behaviour indicates the emerging trends among contemporary Indian metropolitans.