

Aspirations and Reality of Women in the Novels of Shobha De

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Abstract: *SHOBHA DE is one of the eminent and popular novelist of contemporary Indian English fiction. She is a writer with multi faceted personality. She seems to be gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life tactfully. In fact as a writer, she differs considerably from other Indian women novelists writing in English. She believes in very frank telling of incidents and absolute open-heartedness. We don't find anything reserved in her fiction from narrative point of view. Her novels deal with men and women of urban elite class their obsessions, disappointments and insecurities. She portrays the true picture of modern metropolitan life. This paper analyses the aspirations and reality of women in the novels of Shobha de, in particular "SOCIALITE EVENINGS" and "SECOND THOUGHTS". De is a true artist who judges the demand of her modern characters.*

Keywords: Aspiration, Identity, Reality

1. Introduction

Fiction is a kind of mirror reflecting the life of the society, its practices and problems. It indirectly informs, criticizes and lays bare the ills of Society making people think and act. Shobha De's novels indicate the emergence of a new woman curious to revolt against the traditional moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. Her novels represent the new Indian Woman's Voice. A 'New Woman' is in search of self-identity, seeking liberation in all walks of life, replacing the traditional image of Indian woman.

A woman has many roles to play. She can be a guide when a man needs advice, she can be at his service by managing his house, sit by his side during all family rituals, can be affectionate in the form of a mother, a friend and a sexual partner. A woman knows her worth. She has to be a dutiful daughter to her parents, a devoted wife to her husband, a caring beloved to her parents, a caring beloved to her lover and a loving mother to all her children.

In the novel *socialite Evenings* (1990), Karuna, the central character has to cope up with a marriage which could not last longer due to the cruelty and aloofness of her husband in understanding her psyche. Her marriage was a joyless, lifeless and loveless and very boring one where she had to look for another alternative.

She gets bored with her married status and occupies herself busy with write ups of her memoirs. She acquires good fame through her writings, pride in her venture. She becomes a socialite to firm her profession in media. She leads her profession in all aspects with her charms, intelligence and boldness. But she never feels regret or guilty because she wants to fulfill her desires by using the males as gadget or ladder to go up in the life.

Karuna is not an average Indian wife who would readily stoop to conquer in order to gain control over husband. To her marriage turns out pretty terrific since her husband is an average Indian husband. Emotionally and intellectually there

is incompatibility between Karuna and her husband. In the depiction of this incompatibility in husband-wife relationship, Shobha De suggests that a woman of Karuna's type who loves freedom and self-discovery finds marriage to an average man as increasingly meaningless and their love making a listless affair, a vague habit and a passionless mechanical encounter. It is very likely for such a woman to estrange from her husband. To come out of boredom, she has an extra-marital relationship. Karuna is conscious of the fact that she is committing adultery, but continues to plunge deeper into it with feelings of spite against the husband, as it were. "I'd feel like a harlot self-consciously sneaking up to solicit customers", [p 175] when she goes to Krish's hotel for her rendezvous.

Karuna in order to have to have sexual orgy with Krish leaves for London on the pretext of spending some time with her sister there. But then her affair is exposed and her husband suddenly lands in London to thrash things out with her. She not only does not feel ashamed of the betrayal against her husband. But she hold her ground, declaring. She makes an ingenuous declaration about her urgent express herself through love:

"I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him---In venice. There is a good chance that I feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. May be he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant me. In which case it will be a *A Death in venice*. You know by now that I am not the flightly sort. I don't flirt at random like my random like my other friends. I am steady and grounded. Treat this as short term mania that will wear itself out.(186)

On the other hand, another character of this novel, Anjali, is just the opposite. She is one of Karuna's friends in college. Anjali hailing from a very conservative Jain family gets married at a very early age to a very wealthy man who was a Muslim amidst protests from her family. She goes for a second marriage after a quick divorce with a homosexual, yet very rich person named Kumar. Anjali tries to over emphasise the fact that she has done a favor to Kumar by

marrying him .And she wanted to make him feel insecure about losing her . All the women protagonists in the novel considers marriage as a necessity, status, symbol luxury and many more .Most of her do get married to rich men with all their luxuries. However ,Karuna fights her way to reach the top by taking up a job in advertising , television and production world after her divorce and becomes financially independent. Finally she ends up a loner who finds her evenings lonely in-spite of her active participation in “*Socialite Evenings*”.

These feelings have also mentioned in her another novel “*Second Thoughts*” where Maya the protagonists a vibrant college student dreamt” about becoming a journalist and changing the world(141) goes through the same phase of boring and loveless marriage with Ranjan Mallik. *Second Thought* deals with a young middle- class Bengali girl, born and brought up in Calcutta, who makes an arranged matrimony alliance, with a Bombay- based, foreign-returned Bengali. Maya, the young bride, is more fascinated and in love with Bombay than at the prospect of having married Ranjan. Once she lands in Bombay, after the marriage, her disillusionment begins. She realizes that despite Ranjan’s stay abroad, he is very traditional and above all, an insensitive husband. The agony of Mays, who feels trapped in matrimony is the central theme of the novel.

The well- planned and chosen match is in fact a mismatch, much to disgust of the young couple. They never do anything together, be it an outing, watch popular hit comedies, go to eating places or to the beach. While a lot of exciting things take place around Maya, Ranjan is immersed in the evening newspaper. It leaves Maya longing. “If only he’d be more enthusiastic about sharing his city with me”. It troubles her to see that Ranjan refuses to share a single aspect of his life with her. She wonders whether he considers her his rival, or does not have enough faith in her. These things take time”. Under the same roof, they live as strangers. The following excerpt from tenth chapter throws light on the emptiness of their relationship. “Hot weekday afternoons were to be suffered silently and stoically with just the whirr of noisy ceiling fan to stir the warm air around”. Regarding the air conditioner in their room, there exists a tacit understanding that it would be switched on only after dinner, for a short while, so that the room is cooled sufficiently. It runs on the weekend afternoons when Ranjan is occupying the room. Ranjan only speaks to her about economizing on family budget and minutely goes over the weekly budget. Often, in the course of such lectures, he asks Maya to learn something from his mother and follow her.

Maya is constantly depressed because of her crippling loneliness. There is no one in Bombay with whom she can share her miseries. She pities herself for doing nothing in a city that is not her own. There is no one with whom she can giggle and gossip or confess her problems. She feels useless. The feeling of being unwanted gnaws her. She sulks:

“Nobody needed me, absolutely nobody. My parents no longer thought I belong to them. My husband belonged to his mother. It was unlikely that I would bear children who would belong to me. And I did not have a single true friend to call my own”. (267)

In the midst of utter loneliness, mental strain and confusion. Maya reaches such a critical state where she boldly decides to take revenge upon Ranjan by getting entangled in a sexual relationship with Nikhil. Nikhil being an experienced Bombayite had in fact cunningly exploited the innocent Maya by his shrewdness. But when it comes to reality, he very well knows that he cannot be carried away by his temporary romantic stance with Maya, a married woman .So he readily accepts to marry a girl of his mothers choice. At that moment, Maya perfectly fits into the slot of ‘lonely lady forever’.

Both the women have “I am the good thing attitude”. Karuna and Maya try to shed their stand for commitment, spiritual and moral values. They gain maturity as a result of bitter experiences at the hands of male chauvinists. Behind the exterior of glamour and glitter, the reality is extremely bitter.

The glamour vanishes at the stroke of midnight, very abruptly and rudely. One has to learn to live with the stark realities of life. For those who have been taught to conform to the traditions, it is difficult to snap the pious cord that binds them in matrimony.

References

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