

CHAPTER-II

Socialite Evenings: Self-Discovery

Socialite Evenings (1988) is the maiden novel of Shobhaa De. She portrays the true picture of modern metropolitan Indian life, family, society, life-style and thoughts in her novels which appears to many of us too harsh, crude and uncivilized. The picture of woman as economically independent, socially inhabited, page 3 celebrities and competent professionals is dominant in her novels. Most of her novels introduce readers to the inner lives of aristocratic women of Mumbai and shatters completely the myth that upper class independent women have no sorrows and lead a life of happiness and contentment. She probes deep into the psyche of her women characters and reveal the insecurity and agony that lies beneath the outer shining. She depicts that the psychological problems women face are generally the same, as far as human relationships are concerned, whether they belong to upper strata or the lower class of society, whether they are economically dependent or independent. *Socialite Evenings*, set against the backdrop of Mumbai's high society, presents before us the lives of highly ambitious young girls, who find themselves trapped in loveless marriages owing to their aspirations to be rich and engaged in ill-fated extramarital affair, smug selfish husband who use their wives more for social respectability than for love, glamorous parties, fake spiritual leaders, and a picture of moral, spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy and decadence of Mumbai Elite who throw away their traditional cultural values.

Our society characterises woman as loving, caring, gentle, dependent and submissive. In family she is considered an appendage and subordinate to man. She is the mother of man, who afterwards rules over her. Manu, the first lawgiver of the world, advocated in *ManuSmriti* that, "Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males of their families. The father protects her in childhood, husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence" (quoted in Vashista2-3). The contemporary writers being acutely aware of the changing status of women in society try to portray through their female protagonists, the freedom they have won for themselves. Liberated women writers take urban middle or high class women as their protagonists and allow them more space emphasizing the factors which stand away in their way to freedom. Chick lit heroines are the creation of these assertive and confident women novelists, who do not succumb to male domination and

exploitation. The relationship between Shobhaa De and her readers is greatly influenced by the fact that she also belongs to the urban sophisticated women about whom she writes.

Shobhaa De is known for her frank and bold treatment of social problems relating to women belonging upper crust of urban society. She is involved in redefining the personal and domestic roles of women among Mumbai Elite. Her women are sexually autonomous and fall under the category of chick lit heroines, who are always bold and frank in the matters of love and sex. Shobhaa De is preoccupied with sexuality because she feels that this is an area in which women are repressed and perhaps this is an area which is the best for rediscovering their individuality as human beings. Various writers have criticised her on account of her elaborate detail of sex in her novels. Sudhir Kumar considers Shobhaa De “a vamp author” (117) and in S.P. Swain eyes she is a “vamp-feminist” (140) and “her novels are pulp fiction” (140) but Shobhaa De doesn't consider herself a feminist. She says, “I write with a great empathy towards women without waving the feminist flag. I feel very strongly about the woman's situation” (Bhattacharya 3). Most of the critics consider her work an excellent complement in the realm of popular fiction writing.

In India, a modern woman still finds herself caught between tradition and modernity, between what she has learned from her traditional upbringing, the values she has imbibed through education and what she now observes in changed position of society, between what she has learned from her mother and what she learns from the internet. The status of woman has now changed from the mere symbol of sexual object to a subject, who has capability to act like her male counterpart. In contemporary female fiction a serious and conscious attempt is being made by the female authors to portray women in a realistic way as without idealising her as a *Devi*. Broadly speaking, Indian fiction depicts three kinds of women, firstly, the poor, docile, self-sacrificing women, who belong mostly to the rural class, portrayed by writers like Kamala Markandaya, Raj Laxmi Devi and R. K. Narayan; secondly, the middle class women, especially the educated and employed, presented by writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukharjee, Manju Kapoor and thirdly, the neo-rich aristocratic women as depicted by writers like Namita Gokhle, Jhumpa Lahiri, Roopa Bajwa, Versa Dixit and Shobhaa De etc. New woman of the late twentieth and early twenty first century is depicted in literature in a totally different manner. Now a woman in a novel talk, act and aspire like a common human being and the traditional prototypes such as *Pativarta* ideal and others are set aside. Under the spell of

globalization, multiculturalism and newly defined dimensions of social construct, woman has challenged the pre-defined role of patriarchy by fathoming a long path to establish herself as an enlightened being whether it is politics where the first citizen of India is a woman or corporate sector where the country feels pride over the figures like Indira Nooyi, ChandaKocchar, KiranMazumdar Shaw. In spite of it, the time also seems to have come full circle in favour of woman when media, cinema, IT, aviation, academics, space science, politics, corporate and other professional fields are now occupied by woman.

Shobhaa De started writing in the second last decade of twentieth century when the dictates of society were changing rapidly. Women were becoming educated and financially independent. Earlier they were not allowed to, cross the four walls of the house, to have education, and jobs and even the small pleasures like listening music, watching cinema, wearing sleeveless or stylish clothes were also denied to them. A woman however well-educated she might have had to tune herself to socially acceptable jobs like teaching, medicine, law etc., but now her job preferences are turning to modelling, films, advertising, fashion designing, multinational companies, call-centres, journalism, business etc. ShobhaaDe's contemporary writer, NayantaraSahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985) picturizes Sonali in a quite different manner from the stereotypes of women found in Indian English fiction. Sonali is an intellectual, educated at oxford, who stands first in the civil services examination. As a conscientiousbureaucrat, she boldly denies a licence to Mr. Neuman, the representative of an American soft-drinks company. Through her, the novelist shows despite being rich, beautiful, powerful a woman has to face problems in this patriarchal society but through the course of these difficulties a modern educated woman leads her path of life successfully. Another contemporary of Shobhaa De, ShashiDeshpande depicts in *Roots and Shadows* (1983), how the protagonist, Indu rebels against her authoritarian and traditional joint family, leaves home as teenager to study in the big city, and becomes a journalist and ultimately marries a man of her choice. These heroines have some shadow of chick lit heroine in them. ShobhaaDe's women are also shown not like traditional women who devote their life in the service of their husbands and family; rather they are depicted as being obsessed with the desire for wealth, power and fame and are highly challenging, educated and assertive. The picture of women we get from ShobhaaDe's novels shows her intention to reconstruct the established social theory about women. She creates an atmosphere in her novels where a woman is not living as a victim but as a victor.

Socialite Evenings, quite closely follows the line of chick lit novel. Shobhaa De explores the issues of modern women regarding their relationship with the family, career, love-affairs, marriage, friendship and divorce, the issues central to a chick lit novel. She discusses at length in this novel how her protagonist undertakes to smoke while in school with her friends, reads adult magazines, works as a model, aspires to be a socialite, makes boyfriend in the college, talks on the frivolous subjects like dating, dieting, weight, fashion, parties and illicit relationships with her friend Anjali, falls in extramarital affair with her husband's shallow friend, faces problems within the married life, takes divorce, finds contentment in relationships (with her parents and friends) and ultimately she finds herself on the path of self-discovery.

Chick lit characterizes post-feminist women, who are financially independent, powerful and liberated as men are and value autonomy in making their individual choices. Shobhaa De in *Socialite Evenings* paints a society where women are educated, independent, competent and assertive beings and ever expanding media has given them exposure to the job opportunities. The novel shows how Indian women still find themselves marginalised in the hands of their fathers and husbands but ultimately they shake off the bondages imposed upon them and emerge as powerful as men in our society are. Central character Karuna, like a post-feminist, values autonomy and is capable enough to take independent decisions. Karuna, the protagonist has observed from her very childhood that it was her father whose likes and dislikes were taken into account, whether concerning food or clothing or listening music or reading or waking up in the morning etc. and the desires of children were kept on periphery. To quote her: "Mother was preoccupied with what to cook for father's dinner. It never mattered what the children's preferences were. It was always him. We were left out of their little world. If not left entirely, then certainly kept carefully on the fringes" (6). This type of treatment gives birth to rebellion or revolt in the minds of children. As Karuna out of these suppressed feelings initially worked as a model and then acquired a boyfriend, not out of passion but out of rebellion against his father, she affirms, "I suppose it was only the act of rebellion that kept the modelling going for I didn't enjoy it much. ... I widened the rift by acquiring a boyfriend. ... I suppose it was really only one more step in rebellion." (27-28)

The institution of marriage is of grave significance in the lives of young people in India. Marriage connotes a point of maturing in the life of husband and wife; as they take vow to be with each other in every happiness and sorrow. According to *Dharmashastras*, marriage is sacrament.

Simone de Beauvoir favours the institution of marriage in her book *The Second Sex*. To quote her: “Marriage is destiny traditionally offered by society. History proves that marriage is essential to the well-being of human society and that celibacy brings ruin upon states” (445). The idea of marriage, however, has now got diffused with time and now it is being dominated by materialistic considerations. The term undertaking marriage has been re-described in the present time. Women have changed the basic rules to some extent, on account of having economic independence. Now-a-days if a self-sufficient woman chooses to marry a man, it is because she wants to share her life with someone in the fullest sense and not because she is looking for a life-long meal ticket. Today, a woman of independent means cannot be compelled to prolong a bad marriage. Educated, independent, attractive, autonomous and confident socialite women in ShobhaaDe’s novels define marriage in contemporary terms, in which mutual fidelity till death is replaced generally by sexual autonomy. The change in attitude towards marriage signifies, according to Shobhaa De, a big step forward. In the novel Karuna’s views about the institution of marriage are expressed in a conversation with her friend Anjali. Anjali was unhappy in her marriage, but she preferred to stay with her husband for it gave her the much needed protection and social status. And when Karuna asks her to take divorce, she says, “I’m not strong enough. I will die if I have to face the world alone without a man by my side” (81). Karuna too keep sticking in the meaningless marriage because it gives her ‘status.’ Chick lit protagonists like Karuna and Anjali want ‘status’ and a man by their side. They don’t want to go to bed alone in the night. From the perspective of remarks on marriage by Karuna and Anjali, *Socialite Evenings* seems to follow the footsteps of chick lit novel. Contrary to Karuna and Anjali, Aasha Rani in *StarryNights*, craves to marry Akshay not out of his status but she loves him desperately and she is even ready to change her name and religion for him. But Aasha Rani gets desertion from him. She marries in a hurry with Jay in New Zealand because she wants to get out of the artificial and exploitative world of glamour. She gets much needed love, respect and emotional support from Jay but Aasha Rani soon realizes after her Indian trip that Jay married her for her physical beauty and star-status and not out of true love as he is having an affair with Sasha’s nanny, Alice. But by the time Aasha Rani gathers her lost strength and confidence with the support of Jay and prepares herself for the future journey after taking divorce with Jay. Karuna’s marriage also proved a hopeless failure since it was loveless, joyless and bridgeless. She thinks that she had married a wrong man for the wrong reason at a wrong time. Her husband was not a villain, rather an average Indian husband— unexciting, uninspiring and

untutored. He doesn't even know why he married her and whenever she asks him, he just laughs it off. After marriage she soon realises that her world is quite different from her husband's. She fails to get the required emotional support, love, and care from her husband. Nayantara Sahgal depicts that lack of communication becomes the cause of suffering and frustration in marriage. In *The Day in Shadow* (1971), Sahgal reveals, "talk was the missing link"(23) between Som and Simrit, ultimately causing breakdown of their sixteen year old wedlock. Som, a wealthy businessman, leaves no stone unturned to keep Simrit happy with worldly objects but he never tries to understand the reasons for his sensitive, intelligent wife's unhappiness, who only wants to talk to him. The novelist shows, for an educated and sensitive woman like Simrit, her husband's indifference is extremely inhuman, particularly when she whole heartedly desires deeper relationship. She ultimately decides to put an end to her unhappy marriage. Shobhaa De offers a fitting comment about her own marriage in her autobiography, *Selective Memory* around this context:

A woman could walk out of a perfectly secure marriage out of boredom? Karuna the main protagonist is not a bitch, if anything she is far too sensible and controlled. But she is one who recognises her marriage for what it is—empty. Her husband is not a wife beater, a drunkard or a gambler. There isn't any reason to leave him, yet that is what she does. Lack of communication is a valid enough explanation for her. She doesn't justify her decision, point fingers or attribute blame. (330)

The protagonist, however, remains dissatisfied with her married life due to its emptiness, lack of communication, in her in-laws house, especially with her husband. To overcome her boredom, she deviates in search of identity, enjoyment and communication. Her ignorance and inexperience finally bring her divorce, when her husband catches her red-handed. Shobhaa De opines that dialogue or discussion is essential for harmonious marital relationship. The need for talk or dialogue is very much stressed in her works. Due to lack of communication or understanding, a large number of Shobhaa De's characters suffer from the private treatment of broken marriage. The spouses live together under the same roof still they experience emptiness, loneliness and alienation in their lives. It is not the physical loneliness that Shobhaa De talks of, but deeper emotional and spiritual voids created by egoism.

Chick lit heroines are highly conscious of their bodily image. They keep their body beautiful only for themselves. Obsessional preoccupation with the body is the dominant note in modern urban woman's life. She is always conscious about the beauty of her body and the novel

Socialite Evenings testifies this. Karuna as well as her other female friends like Anjali, Ritu, Nisha, Si are all very self-conscious about their appearance. No-doubt, they all are gorgeous but as body is unruly, they keep themselves beautiful with constant monitoring, discipline and remodelling of their bodies. They consider beautiful body as the key to success and source of self-identity. The opening chapters familiarize us about this fact, when Karunaminutely observes Anjali. Karuna recalls her past memories and tries to describe Anjali's appearance when she met her for the first time:

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 shoulder. Although her nose was too prominent and the eyes far from special she carried herself well and the nails added to the memsaaby image. (2)

Anjali, possesses extremely beautiful nails as she often calls them: "My precious talons" (2). She constantly keeps great care of her nails by reshaping and polishing them. One can't help gazing at her satiny nails. One of her lovers got attracted to her because of her beautiful nails. Even at the age of forty or fifty she keeps herself stunning by going to beauty-parlours and taking facial, waxing, threading, haircut, manicure, pedicure and in the matter of clothes she keeps herself trendy with the help of fashion magazines. She also makes aware Karuna after her divorce that it is the time she must start taking care of her body. When Karuna was in the hospital, she gave Karuna a beautiful manicure set in silver and gold, on the date they met in the past. Another character Si is also conscious of her sexy image and her attention can be diverted from anything by giving her foreign fashion glossy magazine. Ritu, another friend of Karuna, is desperately gorgeous and is harmless natural flirt. Her beauty attracts everybody's attention but she never uses the power she has over men, the way some women do. She is very much conscious about her beauty and dressing sense as Karuna says:

If there was one woman I knew who spent the major portion of her time planning wardrobe and jewellery, it was Ritu. She loved dolling up. She loved to watch herself dressing. She would lavish at least an hour and a half before a party going through the whole routine- a leisurely perfumed bath, may be a shampoo, a face scrub with some imported grains, feet and hands scrub with a pumice stone, a good rub with a fluffy towel, deodorant perfume, and then the short but effective make-up routine. Her dressing room resembled the make-up rooms of Hollywood stars. (168)

There is another character, Nisha, whom Karuna calls Indian Marilyn Monroe in flesh and blood. Anjali brought Nisha to Karuna's house just to show that how perfect her body is. When Nisha unclothed herself, she looked pretty grotesque to Karuna with perfect breast and navel. In order to retain the image of sexy body, ShobhaaDe's female characters abstain from conceiving a child. Karuna herself is not at all interested in conceiving baby and tells us about an actress, who confessed that she was all for babies- if she could get them through vending machine. It also indicates that in spite of keeping themselves sexy, it is the desire for independence also that compels them not to conceive a child because children are life-long responsibility. Shobhaa De does not give same attributes to all her characters. Where Karuna is uninterested in having kids, there is Aasha Rani, who wants to get married and to have kids. While Karuna feels depressed when she comes to know of her pregnancy, Aasha Rani feels new light in her life when she gives birth to her daughter Sasha.

Financially independent status of its heroines is the dominant feature of the chick lit novels. It is not necessary that every chick lit heroine should have a career, but all of them have jobs. Heroine's professional identity and workplace experiences are certainly prominent to the texture of chick lit novels and sometimes central to their plot. They prefer to work in high paying jobs, generally in private sector. Craving for independence in modern women leads them to the desire to be on their own two feet which in turn gives them choices in life. The situation of modern women is entirely different from the traditional women in India. Woman is not a subordinate to her husband but a companion, who works shoulder to shoulder with her husband. Contemporary upper class sophisticated women prefer to work in high paying and challenging jobs as media, advertising, fashion, MNCs, films etc. Anjali in the novel, though is the wife of a wealthy playboy, has started dabbling in fashion designing and advertising to be at par with her husband. And after her divorce with her husband, she marries another guy, but unfortunately he turns out a gay. Her second husband gave her Porsche, emeralds, holidays in Biarritz, shopping along the Champs-Elysses, a villa in Ooty, parties every night, unlimited champagne and the choice to pick her bed-mate but discreetly. Her husband is nice in every way but he can't give her sexual fulfilment. So in disappointment she diverts her whole attention towards the devotion of Lord Krishna and tries her hand in interior designing and her business flourishes well in her supervision. She encourages her daughter, Mimi to earn for her own, though money is no problem to her as her father, Abe, is a wealthy person. It is the feeling of self-respect in modern women which compels her to earn for

herself and therefore Anjali inspires her daughter to be independent. Anjali says, “I encourage her. A woman has to be self-sufficient these days” (224). Karuna, the protagonist, also earns for herself while at school and college by doing modelling assignments. Her father scolds her, “Girls from decent families do not cheapen themselves by going in for such things” (7). But being a highly ambitious child, Karuna wanted to get out of her middle class background as she says, “I yearned to be part of the smart and beautiful set that so many of the girls in school belonged so effortlessly” (3). When she married a wealthy man, she has automatically become the part of the upper class society. But she detests her present condition because instead of going to hypocritical glamorous parties and taking care of the house, she has nothing to do. She feels bored of her condition and feels marginalized at the hands of her husband, who is unexciting, uninspiring and boring fellow, always busy in some *Times of India* business magazine. But after an unhappy divorce, she makes an effort to forget a succession of sordid affairs she faced in her life and begins to write her memoirs. She also works as an actor in some plays and finally becomes a director in films. She doesn't even want to remarry when her mother and father ask her. She does not think that security, happiness and fulfilment lie in a relationship with man. Here Karuna's ideas coincide with post-feminism in which woman is taken as self-sufficient and autonomous being. Shobhaa De revolts against patriarchal mind-set that a woman is not complete and safe without a man by her side when she allows her protagonist to remain single. For upper class glamorous women, who find appearance in chick lit, craving for independence and freedom lies not only in the matters of earning money but also in the matters of sex and friendship.

Shobhaa De's female characters are demanding and straight forward in sexual act and talk. Namita Gokhale too, a contemporary of Shobhaa De, in her first novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) deals with the upper crust of contemporary society in metropolitan cities, where the characters change their sexual partners quicker than their clothes. In traditional India sex within the marital status was considered a sacrament. Both husband and wife showed fidelity to each other. Shobhaa De considers the fact true that all people need sex. It is something special, something beautiful and something shared. Women now get sex on their own terms. She adds: “Sex is the bedrock of all relationships. The very fact, that sex is no longer the most dreaded and despised three letter word in India, is enough cause to celebrate” (quoted in Shukla 121). Today the situation is totally different from traditional time in the matter of sex among the so called sophisticated people of modern India. Shobhaa De, in her *Socialite Evenings*, aptly defines sex

within the marital relationships in contemporary terms, in which mutual fidelity till death is replaced generally by sexual freedom. Today husband and wife both feel the slightest need to be faithful to each other. They remain together in a relationship only to make appearances in glamorous parties; otherwise they belong to totally two different worlds. Aasha Rani, the protagonist in the *Starry Nights* has crossed the pool of sexual conventionality without any social and moral sensitivity. There is explicit and detailed description of her sexual encounters with different men. Karuna, in *Socialite Evenings*, is faithful to her husband but as her husband is unexciting, business minded fellow, she feels weary of this relationship. When such a situation arises, modern woman does not take time to indulge in extra-marital affairs to come out of her boredom. As Anjali suggests Karuna to come out of her weariness, “You are bored with your husband. You need an affair” (143). When her husband’s friend Krish, comes to their home for dinner, she falls in love with him. Chick lit heroines does not hesitate to talk about their illicit relationships with their friend. When karuna tells her friend Ritu about her affair, she suggests her that she should not take divorce from her husband because this man doesn’t sound like husband material. She advises her, “If you can have both- a boring husband in the home and an exciting lover on the side lines— perfect” (273). Ultimately, when her husband gets to know about her affair with Krish, he decides to take divorce from her. In this context Neena Arora’s (1991) observation aptly fits itself about man’s behaviour:

Man considers it as normal male behaviour to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical level outside marriage while at the slightest hint of any deviation on her part which may not involve sex, man turns violent and hostile towards his wife and starts persecuting her. (61)

Anjali and her husband Abe are not faithful to each other. Abe flirts and have sex with each and every young friend of Anjali. Anjali once said Karuna half-jokingly, “I have lost all my girlfriends to Abe. The minute he meets them, he starts his seduction plans. It doesn’t take very long. One lunch, two drinks—and boom—they are in bed. I don’t want to lose you” (56-57). Preoccupation with sex is the common feature of chick lit protagonists. Their mind is always obsessed with the desire for sex. Chick lit heroines are bold and frank in the matters of sex. Chick lit heroines think sex as a medicine to get rid of their frustration in life. Same is the case with Anjali, in the matter of sex. Like her husband Abe, Anjali too has many affairs. Excessive preoccupation with sex is dominant among the upper class people in India. They live in luxury and their minds are always pre-occupied with sex. As she said to Karuna, after her divorce with her husband Abe, “I hate to

walk into a room without a man next to me” (93). This frank statement by Anjali on the need of sex drags the novel closer to chick lit. Anjali falls in love with whomsoever she meets and the relationship ends up in sex. She has many affairs- with a government official; Pierre, a Frenchman; Karan, a boy of her daughters age; and finally she remarries Kumar Bhandari, who turns out a gay. The one element that predominates in these relationships is sex. Ritu, another friend of Karuna, falls prey to the advances of Gul, a Muslim drug dealer who turns her to a mediocre who arranges virgin girls for him and his friends. Though sex rules the lives of elite class of Mumbai but it is apparent that satisfaction can be attained in a faithful conjugal relationship. Shobhaa De presents woman as sexually liberated and free thinking that is known as ‘New Woman,’ in later twentieth century fiction.

Shobhaa De has portrayed contemporary urban Indian women belonging whether to upper class or middle class, who are glamorous and have high aspirations and are always obsessed with the desire for wealth, power, name and fame. They prefer to marry men in business, who could afford for their fashion and parties. They think that government officials are not husband material for them. Karuna is always self-conscious about her middle class origin. While at school she yearns to be a part of smart and beautiful girls of upper class society. Her obsession to be rich takes another form at school and in order to attract attention she wears sash hipster-style and swaggers around the basketball court as if she owned it. Her friend, Anjali also belonged to middle class and was working as an air-hostess in Air India. She has married Abe, a wealthy Muslim playboy, who can satisfy all her aspirations to be a socialite of Mumbai Elite. She explains to Karuna:

Basically I wanted to get out of the closed, boring, middle class environment of my family. I wasn’t interested in studies. I wanted on my own, independent. To see the world, meet people, buy lovely clothes and perfumes. What else a pretty girl at that stage wants anyway? (6)

Women of twentieth century are clever enough to secure their future in terms of money, when they marry or take divorce from their husbands. Money is the symbol of power for them and the relationships are measured in material considerations. Shobhaa De has presented a very true picture of elite class women in Mumbai, who value money in their relationships. Karuna, though loved by her family yet she wanted to be rich and lead a luxurious life. Her hunger for luxury and materialistic things is apparent, when she accepts:

All I did was fret and hunger for things I didn't have: a holiday bungalow in the hills, a personal ayah of my very own who would call me Baba. ... My hunger was great and it grew greater by the day for it was never fed. (12)

While in college, she falls in love with Bunty and calls him a sweet enough person, loving caring, affectionate and accommodating but she denies to marry him on the basis that he is not a rich enough person. Though she feels guilty and painful for the break-up with Bunty and says, "One whose only disqualification was his ordinariness" (78). When the matter of marriage comes, her friend Anjali calls government officials and non-businessman that they are not husband material. When Anjali takes divorce from Abe, she does not forget to secure her material comforts. She gets an apartment, a property at Lonavala, substantial shares in his company, jewellery, insurance policy and some other blue chip shares. When she falls in love with a government official, Karuna asks her, "What on earth are you doing with a salaried man, Anjali? You probably spend in one afternoon what the poor man takes three months to earn! You're right—he definitely isn't husband material—not for you" (109-110). Further Anjali married Kumar Bhandari because he is a wealthy businessman. To her disappointment, she does not get sex from him because he is a gay but everything is settled in terms of money. When Karuna takes divorce from her husband, Anjali asks her to take compensation in the form of money because she has invested so many years in that marriage. She thinks it's her right to claim material comforts in return. Chick lit heroines aspire to have enormous money. They evaluate relationships in terms of monetary considerations. All these instances categorize the novel under chick lit genre. ShobhaaDe's upper class women are conscious enough about their material possessions because it becomes very hard to lead life without comfortable things when one tastes the forbidden fruit of luxury. Although money is major factor in the matter of marriage and divorce, these women do not lack the feeling of true friendship.

Chick lit protagonists believe in the importance of true friendship and this very fact is also highlighted by Shobhaa De in *Socialite Evenings* through the characters and thereby her novel comes closer to chick lit. Friendship is a thread that unites together two persons, who may have entirely different thinking, background and economic status. All these things do not become a barrier when two persons understand each other. Shobhaa De has celebrated the importance of friendship in one's life. In this novel, Shobhaa De has pointed out the importance of friendship through the characters of Karuna, Anjali and Ritu. Anjali and Karuna met when life was just beginning for Karuna. When Karuna got admission in college, she started doing modelling and

one day she met Anjali for a modelling assignment, and this is how their life-long friendship began. Anjali supported Karuna in every way. She felt like a secured child under the protection of Anjali. Anjali's all girlfriends fell prey to Abe's advances, but she protected her from all men including Abe, who could be a bad influence on her. She confesses to Karuna, "Life was just beginning for you—and mine was already over. I wanted to protect you and keep you a virgin forever. Seal you off from the world of man" (363). Anjali acts like a protecting figure for Karuna. This speaks for the guilt ridden soul of Anjali and in a similar fashion Aasha Rani in *StarryNights* is highly conscious of what she has lost in her adulterous relationships. She too wants her sister, Sudha Rani to strictly remain away from such life. Later when Karuna was passing through the phase of emotional breakdown owing to her divorce with her husband, at that time Anjali stood by her side for help and care. After leaving her husband's house, when Karuna aborted the child and went through the major operation, it was Anjali who took care of Karuna by day and by night. Karuna said in the novel "I'd never felt lonelier in my life. Anjali was being very supportive and playing mother-hen to perfection" (357). Karuna too, is supportive to Anjali as and when she wants her. Anjali can talk to her on any matter, whether it belongs to her husband's extramarital affairs or her own love affairs or shopping or marriage or her daughter, Mimi etc. Shobhaa De very aptly makes it clear that instead of hypocritical environment among upper class people, true friendship is still alive and is interwoven with an unbreakable thread.

Unlike romances, where the importance is given only to the love life of the heroine, chick lit heroines divert from their love life and find that familial relationships are the most important part of one's life. Shobhaa De in *Socialite Evenings*, emphasizes her belief in strong human relationships especially in the small unit of society, the family. When Karuna goes back to her parents' home, she thinks she would not be welcomed by her parents. She notices a change in the attitude of her mother and father as instead of being indifferent they are very delightful to see Karuna. When her father returns home he simply says, "Let me just say that our doors are always open to our children" (405). Thus, Karuna realizes the valuable support of family in moments of crisis. Karuna is aware of the fact that she is running away from the reality and is making her existence quite superficial. When Girish, one of her acquaintances, asks her to attend film festivals, she refuses to go to parties and functions. She confesses:

But I feel all closed up and insulted. 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 I get back. (408-409)

Karuna assesses the situation thoughtfully. She thinks that in the past she craved for independence and was defiant of all authority imposed on her but now after introspection she discovers that snapping of family ties are traumatic and detrimental. She is amused to be back within the warm fold of family and wishes to remain there forever. It is other way round also. Not only does Karuna need the support of her parents but they too need her, as they are passing through the crisis of her sister's illness. She declines the marriage offer by Girish and assesses the situation:

Living with my parents had opened up a new dimension for me. I felt like a responsible, caring daughter for the first time in my life. They needed me. And I needed them. We had arrived at happy situation. They didn't have a son to look after in their old age. They had the enormous burden of an invalid daughter to cope up. Each day in their life was a major struggle to just get on with the living that remained. How could I abandon them at this point? It would have been a callous, cruel thing to do. Walk in. Walk out. No. There was just no way I was going to stride into my room, fling my few belongings into a suitcase and take off. (434)

She thinks, what if there is no son, she is available to look after her parents. Consequently, the change in her attitude is obvious when she moves from frivolity to responsibility. When her husband comes to fetch her, she refuses to go back with him realising that a life with responsibilities is certainly worth living, better than the unhappy vacuum of matrimony. Shobhaa De in her second novel *Starry Nights* also depicts the importance of familial relationships in one's life. Aasha Rani's Appa, who deserted Aasha Rani's mother and his children when he was prosperous, comes to realize his mistake when everything he owned went to fire. He suffers paralysis and asks for forgiveness from Aasha Rani and her mother. Similarly Sudha Rani, who turned into an indifferent fellow towards her family members, when she became famous actress, realises the importance of family relationships when she was attacked by ruffians who distorted her body and face by setting her on fire.

Love is not the give and take but something that is shared. It is a feeling of caring each other, taking care of likes and dislikes, sharing happiness and sorrows and moving together in the same direction despite some of the differences in opinions. Love is a feeling that comes out of faithfulness, care and affection. Chick lit heroines frivolously talk on their love affairs. They do not even hesitate to move to someone else if they do not find their present partner capable of fulfilling their aspirations. Today people belonging to upper strata of society live a lorn,

hollow and superficial life. There is a spiritual barrenness in their relationships. Shobhaa De in her novel *Socialite Evenings* explored the lives of bored, loveless housewives of businessmen. Anjali is leading a hypocritical loveless life as her husband goes to bed daily with a new girl in their own house before her own eyes. When she got rid of this relationship, she tried to find love in many affairs but all ended up in sex. In *StarryNights* also Aasha Rani does not feel a bit hesitant to have sex with anybody. She loves Akshay from the core of her heart; he uses her merely as a sexual object. Shobhaa De in her *Sisters* (1992) exposes urban independent liberated woman who takes man as play-things. Alisha has sexual intercourse with Navin. She is aware of the fact that he was once engaged to Mikki. Her action is an act of revenge towards her sister rather than any love. Her relationship for Dr. Kurien who attends on her in the hospital is purely physical as the doctor has his wife and children. The doctor's observations to Alisha speak of ShobhaaDe's critical concept of urban woman, "For woman like you, men are play-things, today you want to break up my marriage. Tomorrow you will get bored and move on to some other man. Where will that leave me" (116). Men and women of upper class society take sex as an aspirin to get over a tension or a headache. There is no emotional involvement in the love-making; it is totally a bodily act for them, to get out of their hollowness and frustration in life. Karuna and her husband sleep together but they hardly ever talk to each other with love and affection. Love-making between Karuna and her husband takes place rarely and whenever it happens, she never enjoys it. Anjali too considers love-making with her husband a mechanical activity. Whenever Abe makes love to her she just gaze towards ceiling and as soon as it is over, she washes herself and goes to sleep. Karuna in a lovelorn condition tries to find it outside marriage in extramarital affair with Krish. But this relationship too is based on hollowness of sex. Ritu too, another character in the novel, tries to find love in an extramarital affair with Gul but he reduces her to a mediocre who arranges young girls for him and his friends for sex. Karuna discovers love and care when she goes back to her parents after divorce and feels a great satisfaction. Love needs sacrifices but no one seems to be in the mood to sacrifice in the present day. Relationships are based on material considerations. People remain in relationships only to make appearances in the parties and clubs. There is spiritual hollowness all around and people misunderstand love to the mechanical act of sex.

Shobhaa De discusses at length the hypocritical environment at the parties organized by so called sophisticated people of Mumbai. Such parties are thrown to earn name and fame and to show the money power. People make false appearances in these parties. Husbands and wives go

together but separate themselves in groups where females talk frivolously about their husbands, shopping, fashion etc. and males talk about their business. These parties are a source of fame as the affairs of these parties find rumours in the gossip columns of next day newspapers and magazines. It is the common belief among upper class people that at least the break-up of two marriages is the parameter of success of such parties. Karuna feels bored of such parties. She has to go for these parties only as a social obligation. When Girish asks her to accompany him in the film festivals, she denies going with him because she is trying to reconnect with herself and her parents at that time. Such parties disturb her and take her away from reality. Girish goes to Varun's party not because he feels like going there but because he does not want to enrage him by declining his invitation. Shobhaa De in her novel *Starry Nights* has laid bare that among elite class of Mumbai husband-wife relationship is based on hypocrisy. There is no emotional bonding between husband and wife. They remain together for social status and to make appearances in socialite parties. Having a home-maker wife at home and many slim, beautiful, glamorous mistresses outside is the common practice in Bollywood film industry in India. This reminds us of *The Way of the World* (1700) by William Congreve, where every male has an illicit relationship and every female entertains male for sexual urge. In the novel, *Starry Nights* (1991) the producer of Aasha Rani's first film, Kishenbhai, is a married man but he has extra-marital affair with Aasha Rani. Kishenbhai and his wife are in marriage because they want to maintain their social status. Hypocrisy in Akshay and his wife's relationship begins the very day they got married. Malini, despite being aware of her husband's affairs with many co-stars, replies when asked by a reporter, "I trust my husband. He will never do anything to hurt me" (67). Aasha Rani and her husband both are leading a life of hypocrisy. As soon as Aasha Rani's husband leaves her in India to fulfil her dream, she maintains sexual relationship with Jojo and later in plane with Gopalakrishnan. Her husband also maintains an affair with his daughter's nanny, Alice. Through the lives of these characters Shobhaa De wants to show that sacred relationship of husband and wife is most hypocritical in the glamorous world. Hypocrisies of the upper class people laid bare by Shobhaa De are indicative of the fact that such people are not same as they appear. They hide their real intentions behind their dark goggles.

Shobhaa De's novels emphasize the equivalence of power. Whenever this balance collapses, there arises tension in society and double dealings and hypocrisy predominate. She easily visualizes a change taking place in contemporary society in respect of power balance. Now,

‘new woman’ is eager to get the equal powers like men as Shobhaa De in *Shooting from the Hip: Selected Writings* (1994) writes—

It is the time they were made aware of their own potential and power. Shakti needs to be harnessed, directed and explored for the furtherance of overall human development. The very concept of sexes locked in eternal battle is negative and destructive. When one talks of Shakti unleashed, one also remembers the two connotations of Shakti— the destructive avatar is as potent as the creative one. It is in maintaining the state of equilibrium between these two opposing forces that leads to creative and dynamic harmony. (111-113)

But men are not willing to accept it and express their anxiety over the changed power equation.

The complementary image of man-woman relationship is completely shattered in the novels of Shobhaa De. Husband and wife are considered the two facets of the same coin but this is not the case within ShobhaaDe’s world. Husband and wife are shown as the two banks of a river who can never meet. Karuna, in this novel, never treats her husband as her partner deserving due attention, love and care. His presence is minimized as much as possible. She does not even mention the name of her husband throughout the novel. She uses the word ‘He’ to refer to him. Her husband too never asks about her likes and dislikes. He never discusses his business matters her and never seeks her advice in anything. To quote her: “Initially the husband talked to me about his plans for the firm and like a dutiful wife I listened and tried to show some enthusiasm. All this faded to nothing by the end of the first year of our marriage” (89). Same is the case with Anjali. When Karuna called her husband ‘Ape,’ at first, she pretended to take offence but later, she used to laugh over it with Karuna. Karuna thinks over the changing situation of women in Mumbai. Women in Mumbai work, marry, take divorce and remain single and Karuna wonders over her own situation that, why she is prolonging a meaningless marriage. She thinks that perhaps she is afraid of failure but at last she gathers courage to be on her own two feet and says good bye to the nonsense marriage. Finally, she discovers herself and while living with her parents, she feels like a responsible, caring daughter for the first time in her life and enjoys the feeling of newly acquired independence. When her mother asks her to remarry, she exhorts her mother:

But mother why does security rest with a man? 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 don’t really have any 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 can’t make any “sacrifices”— not now. (441-442)

Karuna remains dissatisfied with all the three phases of her life—unmarried, married and the life after divorce from her husband. She was terribly self-conscious of her middle class origin in her childhood days. When she returns from USA, she felt “I need my own space. I need to find myself”(78). But the glamorous life of Mumbai has its hypnotic effect upon her and she again finds herself lost in the false glittering of the city. She fails to get rid of the feeling of loneliness and emptiness in her life, when she deserts Bunty, her boyfriend, after returning from USA. Though she gets enough attention and affection from her parents and sisters, her sense of freedom and liberty makes her rebel against her father and patriarchy and she opts for the job of modelling without seeking permission from anybody. Anjali helps her at every step in her life. Karuna becomes firmer and fiercer in her determination against patriarchy. She finds her mother’s condition very pathetic because her father condemns her mother for nothing and she silently bears the harsh words of her husband. Virginia Woolf’s comment practically suits it, that, “Imaginatively she is of the highest importance. Practically, she(a woman) is completely insignificant.” (45)

Woman is herself responsible for her subjugation and subordination. A significant fault of women is that they do not show enough courage to face a man’s irrational wrath. Karuna takes an unusual and unprecedented decision of modelling without seeking permission from her father despite her mother’s caution. Her mother doesn’t have courage either to protect her daughter or challenge her husband and she asks Karuna, “You tell him. Don’t involve me. Later he will blame me if anything happens” (7). It apparently shows that how insignificant is the role of her mother in taking decisions about her children. The novelist however, points out that the proper development of a child’s personality in a family is possible through filial love and concern of parents, in the absence of which the child is most likely to be led astray, like Karuna, Anjali and others.

In the second phase of her married life also, she remains dissatisfied due to its emptiness, lack of communication especially with her husband. To overcome her problems, she deviates in search of identity, enjoyment, communication and belongingness. A year after or so, the status of Karuna in her husband’s house and family becomes insignificant. This type of exclusion affects her morality and womanly pride. In this regard a renowned psychologist, Dr Rollo May observes that:

Communication recovers the original “we-ness” of the human beings on a new level—one related to another not as receptacle for the expression of one’s own sexuality, or as being to be exploited for assuaging of one’s loneliness, or in any other way as an object, but as human being in the full meaning of that term. Communicating leads to community that is to understanding, intimacy, and the mutual valuing that was previously lacking. (quoted in Kanupriya66)

Karuna’s case draws our attention to the all-pervading malady known as ‘lack of communication’ between husband and wife or between other relationships in a family. This malady is more prevalent in our metropolitan cities, where life is very fast.

Chick lit deals with the daily life experiences of its heroines and is considered not having any serious literary value, which helps in the upliftment of the society. But, these novels are the expressions of the heroines’ inside feelings, who are no other than working independent young women, we meet in our daily life. The fiction helps in the upliftment of these women, who during the course of ups and downs in their lives discover themselves. The title of the novel connotes that marry making and pleasure seeking is the hobby of the high class elite of Mumbai. These parties are thrown at regular intervals and people come with false smiles on their faces. Means of getting pleasure in upper class society are buying costly cars, throwing luxurious parties and having extramarital affairs. With enormous wealth at disposal, they have no worry in life unlike an average man who works hard to earn his living. In the parties men and women drink, some of them create scenes and get popularity by getting a column printed in the gossip headlines in magazines and newspapers. Evening, darkness or night also connotes something which is bad. The events in the novel *Socialite Evenings* depict that these parties become cause of breaking up of some marriages and bring darkness in their lives.

Anjali, Karuna’s friend in the novel, after taking divorce from her husband Abe, with whom she has been living a loveless unhappy marital life, commits her second mistake by marrying Kumar Bhandari, a ‘homo,’ who needs her as a front in society. Anjali’s desire to lead a proper married life with a suitable husband and home gets shattered and she turns to spiritualism and religion to seek relief from her mundane existence. Anjali recovers through her faith in religion and self-realization through meditation. She realizes that peace and love are essential for harmonious development of entire humanity. Anjali’s heart is now full of love for all and she forgives everybody, even Si, who has always given harsh comments on her. Anjali is such a character in the novel, who runs from pillar to post—in search of real peace and happiness. Her

life incidents suggest to the reader that if one is in search of real happiness, he/she should opt for a life of simplicity and self-introspection.

Another character gorgeous and vivacious, Ritu, leaves her husband for a smuggler, Gul, who reduces her to nothing. She lives a sick and servile life under Gul and to get herself free from him, she makes a half-hearted suicide attempt by taking a handful of pills along with whisky. Ritu returns to her husband after her suicide attempt, who accepted her without asking any questions. Though her husband is boring, she now understands that he is very caring, sweet and good person. Ritu recovers herself in the lap of nature and the process of her reviewing starts. The novelist is also in the favour of a marriage, which is based on love, care, mutual understanding, respect and a sense of sacrifice between husband and wife.

Karuna, with the passage of time has developed self-confidence, which is evident from her snubbing Varun, a very powerful editor of the *Outlook*, who had been defaming her by connecting her name with Girish, a film producer, in his newspaper columns. The same self-confidence is noticeable in her rejection of a lucrative offer from Randhir Roy to figure in a documentary. When he comes up with a proposal to make a documentary with Karuna's life experiences, she replies:

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 go 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.
(491)

The protagonist in *Socialite Evenings*, a prominent Mumbai socialite, after going through many ups and downs in her life, takes divorce from her husband and ultimately discovers her true-self. She begins to write a memoir of her life in the first person narrative as: "I was born in a dusty clinic in Satara, a remote village in Maharashtra..." (1). First person narration brings it closer to chick lit. The use of first person narration in the novel conveys the notion that this novel though fictional, is in depth portrayal of women's experiences. The shift from third person narrative to first person narrative strengthens the heroine's voice and increases the reader's opportunity to identify with her. Through the character of Karuna, Shobhaa De has tried to present a picture of modern liberated woman, who is active, smart, economically independent and perfectly in tune to the ways of society.

The novel leads towards a pertinent change in the mind-set of the characters in the novel. Karuna's father, who was strict in the past in the matter of allowing freedom to her daughters, becomes a liberal fellow. When Karuna comes back home, after her divorce with her husband, her father welcomes her back warmly. In the case of Karuna, we observe that she comes to ground as she was living in dreamland. She was highly obsessed with the word 'status,' so much so that she felt ashamed even of her middle class family; in the end she comes to realize the importance of roots in one's life. Anjali too diverts her attention to religion and meditation to find peace and contentment.

The novel begins with the characters' obsession for wealth, name and fame. Karuna becomes a model to be the part of rich and sophisticated circle of Mumbai Elite. Her marriage decision was also inspired by the desire to be prosperous. Anjali married Abe because she wanted to get rid of her middle class origin. Similarly Ritu goes with Gul for his monetary power. But these characters soon realize that the relationship based on monetary consideration prove fickle and shallow as emotional bonding is not there in these relationships. Finally, the characters find consolation either in family or in the endeavour to connect with their true-self. In *SocialiteEvenings*, Shobhaa De suggests the readers that economic independence, familial relationships and self-realization through meditation are the keys to a peaceful and harmonious social life. Chick lit heroines find their course of self-discovery through constant struggle and experiences of their daily life. The definition of chicklit as given by Malynowski and Jacobs (2006) fits itself in the novel *SocialiteEvenings*, it says: "Contrary to popular belief, chick lit is not all about shoes. Or clothes. Or purses. ... but the chick lit story is about the main character's road to self-discovery" (10). Following the dictates of chick lit, *SocialiteEvenings* emphasize the self-discovery of its protagonist, Karuna through the course of her daily life experiences.

In the subsequent chapter an attempt is made that how the protagonist, Aasha Rani, somewhat under her mother's pressure and somewhat under the aspiration of her own to be rich and famous, suffers mental, physical and sexual exploitation at the hands of males. But the hopeful attitude of Aasha Rani among the ups and down of life helps her to overcome difficulties and come out victorious amongst worst circumstances.

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