

## CHAPTER – IV

### Conclusion:

Contemporary urban woman belonging to upper crust of society is highly educated, confident, independent, glamorous and challenging. She is today not satisfied in meekly following and performing social, natural and sexual roles assigned to her by patriarchal domination. The 'new woman' in metropolitan cities is not an object of male subordination or subjugation but an assertive being, who claims for freedom in personal matters, chiefly in matters of love and sex. Traditional values are yielding place to the influencing spirit of modernism. T.S. Eliot has aptly laid down the link between past and present as that, "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (295). Modern woman has designed her own codes of conduct which are free from the established gender roles and sexual restraints of traditional society. Today woman has the capacity to raise a banner of revolt against the established order in words and deeds, be it social, business or sexual spheres, but at some points they too seem to carry forward the legacy of past.

Chick lit makes fascinating character study and covers the heroines struggle at personal and professional level and depicts the picture of 'new woman'. The genre is equated most of the times, with something frivolous, something ordinary. But it is not the case that it only depicts one facet of woman's life that is, her craving to be thin, obsession for fashion and shopping or drinking too much alcohol and nothing more. It also portrays the true picture of modern highly ambitious woman whose life touches upon the serious issues like reflecting on the circumstances that she faces while attempting to lead a satisfactory life. Contrary to the popular belief, it is the story about the protagonist's course of self-discovery. It's a medium of reaching the unreachable thereby bringing the insides out of the woman's world.

In many ways contemporary women are no longer battling to come from the margins into the mainstream. The unbelievable success of chick lit, featuring independent, professional protagonists, proves that women have left such battles behind. But it does not mean that women no longer face partiality and inequality. There is no doubt they have entered the workplace and are working at par with their male counterparts but they still receive less pay than their male colleagues and are considered less efficient than men. Working women have to bear an inordinate burden in

terms of household works and child care. Though women like Indira Nooyi, Chanda Kocchar, Kiran Majumdar Shaw, Renuka Ramnath etc. are enjoying the status of CEO's in multinational companies and they are performing well in their fields but there are many women working in MNCs with huge workload, who face problems in balancing their duties at professional and personal fronts. And there are crores of other women working for 10-15 hours a day, exploited at every level—be it family, workplace or society. But despite giving better results at the workplace they are not considered equal to men. Recently, the revelations made by the investment banker, Nina Godiwalla, about women on Wall-Street, have taken America by storm. In her novel *Nina's Suits: A Woman on WallStreet*, she has laid bare the present reality that women face. A woman is still considered a minority there and is not taken at par with her male counterpart. Nina makes it clear in an interview by Yaswant Raj that:

As minority you will be scrutinised. And if you are a woman, expect ten times the challenge. If they drink, you should drink. (However) Don't think you can do whatever they do. They look at you differently than they do themselves. You will be required to prove yourself. You DO NOT get the benefit of doubt. One slip can cost you years of hard work. (6)

Chick lit focuses on the lives of such women who try to balance personal and professional satisfaction. A woman is expected to play traditional roles of wives and mothers, even if she is independent, confident and self-assured. Woman was once a silent spectator, who was expected to play traditional roles of wives and mothers. She was just a puppet in the hands of man. She was the theme of the major part of the literature written by male writers and she was portrayed as docile, submissive, self-sacrificing and dependent on man. But the modern woman, sometimes known as chick lit writer, took the new instrument, the unfamiliar weapon, 'the pen' into her hands and started depicting her day to day experiences and the deep, personal inner thoughts. Pamela Coaghie, professor of English and Women's Studies at Loyola University in Chicago defines the genre by pointing out that the characters in the post-feminist fiction might be "seen as confident, independent, even outrageous women taking responsibility for who they are, or as women who have unconsciously internalized and are acting out the encoded gender norms of our society." (quoted in Mazza 21)

The genre raises issues of major concern which women are currently engaged in addressing. Chick lit also exposes many generational conflicts—between mothers and daughters,

second and third-wave feminists and reflects on the divisions of women in terms of age, class, race, and ethnicity. Some chick lit novels depict the competition between female bosses and their employees; others take the competition between women over men. Chick lit, featuring African-American protagonists, has challenged its overemphasis on white, middle class characters. In Indian chick lit the mainstream characters make their appearances in *saris* with stiletto heels, *bindis* and gorgeous make up. Chick lit seems to be a facet of feminism, which discusses female issues though at a narrower level. Sometimes we tend to ignore many issues by calling them as trivial and small, but we forget that every brick is important for building.

Owing to the depiction of daily life experiences of its heroine, chick lit is considered as not having any serious literary value, which helps in the moral and social betterment and upliftment of the society. Madhuri Banerjee, a chick lit writer in India compares it, in an interview to *India Today*, to the “fast food” (54) for the readers as they read it for a change in their regular lives. But these novels are the expressions of the heroine’s inner feelings, who are no other than working independent young women, whom we meet in our daily life. Although, the fiction does not help in the upliftment or betterment of society, but it helps women during the course of ups and downs in their lives. Apart from exploring all the issues discussed in these novels, the present study found that chick lit novels fulfil a very important function of bringing women’s life out of all the myths and mysteries that were heaped on them. Indian English fiction by women writers is growing day by day focussing on the problems of women and their aspirations for economic independence, equality and freedom. Shobhaa De’s concern for women is reflected in her novels and having lived and experienced the glamorous high society artificial life, she exposes the hollowness of Indian urban life, family, marital relationships and society, particularly about glamorous urban women. She takes up female as the protagonist in her novels and represents the predicament of the Indian woman placed between two poles: between family and profession, 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. The status of woman has now changed from the object of sexual desire to a subject, who has capability to do anything like her male counterpart.

Shobhaa De has started writing with feminist concerns and subsequently switched herself to the feminist-cum-humanist approach to life. Her novels are set in the glittering backdrop of Mumbai’s elite culture where men and women lead luxurious but reckless lives, throwing away

all traditional values. Her women are highly challenging, educated and assertive and are obsessed with aspiration for wealth, power and fame, whoopt for high flying careers like modelling, movies, business, journalism and advertising etc. Though she reveals the darker side of human nature, the squalor and the evil in human society, but her main concern is to depict successfully the importance of relationships in our life. Karuna, the protagonist in *Socialite Evenings* rebelled against her father's wishes and became a model, but after her divorce she found peace and contentment in her parents' home. Her women are not the passive characters but are career oriented, getting married, having children and hopefully taking decisions regarding what to do next. Her women are not the slaves of men but are liberated beings, who keep a string of men tied under their belts, so that when one fails to live up to their expectations, they can move on to the next one. One may call her fiction as 'Masaala,' 'Pulp fiction' or something else, but her treatment of contemporary urban woman's challenges, predicament, values and life-style is not insignificant.

The protagonists; Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* and Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights* are financially independent, working outside the home and sexually assertive who closely follow the footsteps of chick lit. When we talk about sex, Aasha Rani is more autonomous as she is ready to have sex with anybody, though she was forced by her mother in the beginning to do so, but now she becomes habitual of it and do it at her own will. Even after her marriage, when she comes to India, she does not feel a bit hesitant while having sex with Jitendra Mehta and later in the aeroplane with Gopalakrishnan, who was her father's friend. Aasha Rani is not a passive partner in sex rather she is a demanding sexual partner. But contrary to Aasha Rani, Karuna does not break her moral codes even when she was asked by Charlie, her school friend, to arrange a boy for her to have sex with. After marriage she was faithful to her husband but continuous neglect and lack of communication between Karuna and her husband led her to deviate from her path, though only for a short time. In this context Karuna claims less credit to be a chick lit heroine than Aasha Rani. In *Socialite Evenings* (1989) Karuna's friend Anjali is closer to this norm as she is more demanding and autonomous in the matter of sex as she affirms before Karuna, "I hate to walk into a room without a man next to me" (93) and she does not feel a bit of hesitant to maintain an affair with a boy less than the age of her daughter. Similarly Aasha Rani's sister Sudha Rani is also autonomous in the matter of sex as she is free to have sex with anybody and lives with Amar in live-in, a new trend of relationship.

The post-feminist sensibility in chick lit heroines to 'please themselves' and to make their body beautiful by shaving, waxing, dieting etc. only for themselves finds expression in both the novels. Although Karuna is not so much conscious of her beauty but Anjali asks her to be conscious, when she gives a gift of manicure pedicure set to her that, "I know you don't. But it's time you started" (364) taking care of your body. Anjali and Ritu are such characters who are very much conscious of their physical beauty. They keep themselves update with the help of fashion magazines. Gorgeous and vivacious Ritu spends a considerable part of her time planning her wardrobe. Aasha Rani too is conscious of her beauty. In the manner of a chick lit protagonists she transforms herself into a charmingly beautiful girl from an ugly fat one after coming to Mumbai. She does not consider anybody as far as her looks are concerned. As soon as she accepts the *mahoorat* invitation at Madraas, she starts planning for her dress. Similarly, when her husband Jay throws a party on her comeback from India, and when she comes to know of her husband's affair with Alice, she decides to wear *sari* for the occasion to look sexy and gorgeous even though her daughter dislikes her wearing *sari*. Though her husband likes her to wear *sari* as in patriarchal mind-set *sari* symbolises subordination of woman. Many pins tagged in *sari* to keep it tight are indicative of bondages imposed upon woman. Kamala Das, a famous Indian confessional poet, too points out this type of patriarchal mind-set in her poem *An Introduction*, "Dress in sarees, be girl / Be wife, they said" (40-41). But Aasha Rani on that day chooses to wear it only for herself to look gorgeous, not out of her husband's preference and it indicates a farewell to her husband. Aasha Rani thinks over that:

She would dazzle and disarm them all tonight. She would show them she was not just a 'bloody native,' some tribal woman from the back of the beyond. Aasha Rani went back to her room and chose a flashy sari—the sparkling pink one with sequins all over... She applied her make-up carefully... Jay looked up when Aasha Rani walked down the stairs... 'My God, darling, you look dazzling,' he said drawing his breath. She looked at him evenly and said a soft thank you. They both knew that what she really wants was farewell. (347-348)

Contrary to Aasha Rani, Indu, the protagonist in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* (1983) thinks always of her husband as she says:

When look into the mirror I think of Jayant. When I dress I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him, always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him? And I can't blame him. It's not he who has pressurized me into this.

It's the way I want to ... have I become fluid with no shape, no form of my own.  
(89)

Indu is the emblem of a woman who has internalized patriarchal thinking, whereas Aasha Rani, Karuna, Anjali, Ritu and other chick lit heroines are autonomous beings who have preferences of their own in every matter and they have the capacity to challenge and break patriarchal domination. Shobhaa De is a conscious writer as she does not give all the characteristics of chick lit heroines to all of her characters. She carefully chooses different traits for her central characters. Aasha Rani craves to bear baby and feels happy when she becomes mother and thereby deviates to some extent from the path of chick lit heroine, who does not want to have baby being too conscious of her bodily figure. In this context Karuna follows strict line of chick lit heroine as she does not want to have baby because bearing a baby will disfigure her body and brings life-long responsibilities.

Today's global world is one where the craving for materialistic things makes a person highly ambitious. Karuna's ambition to be rich and to be on her own two feet gets her to the modelling profession. When she marries, the decision was based on the monetary considerations only and not on love. Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights* is highly ambitious. This finds impression in the novel as,

The set had represented a deluxe-luxury bedroom. The Indian film maker's idea of how the rich lived and lolled. Aasha Rani had thought it was the most gorgeous room she'd ever seen. Velvet bedspreads, brocade curtains, rexine love-sheets, pink telephones, guilt-edged mirrors and a fountain! She had turned to *Amma*, her eyes large and wondrous. 'Can we also have a room like this?' she had asked. (37-38)

This openly lays bare consumerism in chick lit heroines. Sudha Rani is also perfectly in tune with chick lit heroine being extremely greedy for money. Kishenbhai's words to Aasha Rani about Sudha are good proof of her greed, "That girl has no feeling, nothing. She is only after money. I wonder who she's taken after. Money, sex and fame" (261). All the female characters be it Karuna, Anjali, Aasha Rani or Sudha, in both the novels, are after money, name, fame and sex. They turn to consumerism because there is emotional and spiritual hollowness in their lives and to fulfil that gap they turn themselves to shopping, drinking and other prohibited things.

Change is the law of life, and the status of women all over the world has been undergoing a rapid change in contemporary times. Central to *Socialite Evenings* is an attempt made by Karuna

to liberate herself from the boring and marginalized life with her husband and to discover her trueself. She points out firmly that financial independency only can bring liberation to a woman to lead a life of dignity and self-respect. After her divorce, she starts earning for herself and soon becomes able to earn enough for her family. She discovers that she is not a weak person but as strong as a man can be and there is no need of man in her life. Karuna becomes sensible enough to take care of her old parents and to give them a few moments of contentment and happiness. Shobhaa De suggests readers that self-introspection, meditation and economic independence are the keys to a peaceful and harmonious life.

Shobhaa De has lived and experienced the life of glamour and her perception of reality of the world finds expression in the novel *Starry Nights*. It truly depicts how Aasha Rani, under the pressure of her mother's desires, becomes a leading actress surrendering her body and soul to the exploitation of males. She strengthens herself at the end of the novel by facing many ups and downs in her life. The day to day account of Aasha Rani's life issues as family relations, love, marriage, affairs etc., secures its place in chick lit. After getting through the harsh realities of life she emerges out hopeful and confidently decides to resurrect her father's studio. She gathers enough strength and promises herself that she will triumph over the world with her daughter Sasha and her sister Sudha Rani.

Chick lit novels are usually written in first person narrative. Shobhaa De too has written *Socialite Evenings* in first person narration because it focuses on a female central character and conveys the notion that this novel although fictional, is in-depth portrayal of woman's experiences. Shobhaa De has also celebrated the importance of friendship in her novels. Karuna and Anjali became friends while working on modelling assignments. Karuna and Anjali always remain ready to help each other in worst circumstances. Similarly in *Starry Nights*, Aasha Rani forgives her sister Sudha Rani when she has suffered a murderous attempt from ruffians. The element of chick lit fits in these novels, for friendship is also a matter of core concern in the lives of these protagonists. Another common feature in chick lit is the mention of interfering mothers in the lives of their daughters. Aasha Rani's mother fit herself in the framework of chick lit as she controls the life of her daughter on the other hand Karuna's mother is not so interfering and gives her daughter freedom to make independent choices and stand by her in her decisions despite her father's rage.

Though chick lit characterises women as autonomous and liberated beings in the matters of decision making, money, love, sex etc. and give the sense that equality is achieved and now there is no further need to talk of their emancipation. It depicts women as victor than the victim of circumstances. But it delineates only the partial picture of the contemporary society. Such women represent a very small part of society and the inclusive picture of women is far away from the chick lit protagonists. An ordinary woman faces exploitation, suppression, and discrimination at every level—be it individual, familial, socio-cultural, political and economic. Patriarchal prejudices seem to have penetrated so deep into the psyche of an average Indian that to talk of woman as an equal partner still appears to be a scarce reality. Central and state governments are adopting certain measures to bring equality and justice to women. The mind-set of men toward women is also undergoing a change in society. There are many success stories at national and international level which suggest how she asserts her identity so much so that her essential worth is being realized by family and society. The election of Chhavi Rajawat, an unmarried girl, as the *sarpanch* of the village at Soda in district Tonk of Rajasthan is the proof of the change in the thinking of people. Similarly, Geeta, the granddaughter of the former *Azad Hind Fauz* soldier, Ram Swaroop, has lit his pyre as per his wish. Though these success stories are still devoid of inclusivity as most women protagonists of success come from exclusive categories but the good sign is that change is taking place. Now, when she seems to evade the tag of ‘doubly subaltern’ by creating a niche and space for herself where she can voice her preferences to reflect her identity, the society cannot remain insensitive to her revival as an autonomous being.

Universities are known as institutions for producing knowledge, research and learning, they have a responsibility to produce such citizens who can imbibe values and practices of equality and respect for all especially towards women. Realizing such an obligation toward the issues of women and society the Central University of Haryana has organised a workshop “Addressing Discrimination Against Women: Walk the Talk” from 18-20<sup>th</sup> May, 2011, in the direction to sensitize women to the discrimination in our society right from the womb to the grave. Professor Mool Chand Sharma, the Vice Chancellor of this university, has conducted the workshop with the support of faculty members, because he believes that despite positive developments and success in the areas like enhanced rate of literacy, nine per cent growth rate and a number of progressive legislations, women in India still remain victim of violence (including in the family), exploitation (social, economic, familial), exclusion, marginalization and discrimination. There is no doubt that

India has made phenomenal progress in every field. But it cannot be neglected that on many fronts and issues, a lot more is still wanting and one glaring amongst them is the challenge posed by persisting discrimination and denial of dignity to women. Professor Mool Chand Sharma, has suggested a viable solution to this problem in his message:

This demands ‘unlearning, learning and new learning’; ‘construction, deconstruction and new construction’ of experiences and practices prevailing in the society and families. This calls inculcating the art of a perpetual self-probing, self-enquiring and self-inquisitorial way of thinking and acting on part of all-society, community, family and individual.(Sharma n. pag.)

Though the deep rooted menace of discrimination cannot be disrupted so easily with a single stroke and it demands bringing changes in mental attitude in bilateral forms. On the one side, woman is to be made aware of the fact that she is no less efficient, competent and strong than man in any respect, so that she may not internalize the imposed socially constructed gender rules marginalizing her position in society. On the other side, man should be made to change his mentality about woman by giving up his self-interest and prejudiced views creating discrimination against woman so that she may attain just and respectful place with man in the society.

Shobhaa De though does not write about middle or lower class females but she as a writer is gifted with extra-ordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life. She narrates each and every aspect of human relationship in general and man-woman in particular. On the surface her novels seem to deal with sex only but she never approves of adultery, promiscuity or deviant sexual behaviour. Each of her novel deals with sex, but by the end she gives the prime importance to family, children and harmonious marital life. The fiction of Shobhaa De focuses on metropolitan activities, sophisticated lifestyle, globalization, café culture, anglo-americanization and the convent education of the present generation of women. She has accurately and adequately identified sexual-harassment, work-life imbalance, the issues pursuing the professional women today. Shobhaa De has articulated strongly in her recently published autobiographical book, *Shobhaa at Sixty* (2010): “Never allow society to define your self-image... There are no such roles, as if anybody tries to impose them please feel at liberty to tell the person off.” (150)

The whole exploration of Shobhaa De’s of novels gives us the picture of modern, elevated women typically found in chick lit and who can best be described under the definition of Stephanie Davis-Kahl (2008) as “compelling stories ... about modern women struggling with work,

relationships, motherhood, infertility, finances and yes, the right shoes to wear with right dress” (18). It can be concluded that Shobhaa De’s chick lit novels, are not all about the frivolous activities but it is the expression of suppressed feelings in heroines own words, as these overpower a woman to take pen and to write her insides out. It is like an excursion in which a woman escapes from reality but soon returns back to face boldly harder facts of life.

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