

## Marital Incompatibility in Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings*

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### Abstract

*Shobha De, the dynamic personality and journalist observed the glamorous world of modeling, films and high society. She is a social commentator and a writer. Karuna the protagonist of ShobhaDe's Socialite Evenings hails from a middle-class family. Initially she works as a model, and then resorts to writing and later turns to making advertisement films. She meets all sorts of people during her career and thus becomes insightful about human relationships. She craves to be included under the 'charmed circle of rich girls who had everything and are associated with aristocratic family'. As a result, Karuna fails to get the required emotional support from her husband and decides to separate from him. Karuna's initiation into a fashionable world of modern life begins at Anjali's fancy palace at Malabar Hill. Shobha De emphasizes that in a man-woman relationship, it is not the woman who is to be blamed. The new generation of woman is alerted as they have become acutely aware of the traps in marriage.*

**Keywords:** marital discord, subjugation, demystification and emotional support

Shobha present women protagonists who blatantly denounce the validity of the existing social norms; and rebel against the moral codes, which deny women freedom. They are women conscious of their emotional needs and consequently clamour for a change of social order. They herald a new morality that demands accommodation of individual desires for self-fulfillment. Emancipation to them is not confined to the realms of social and economic freedom. It is more the freedom of mind that seeks to assert itself, one that will not deter them from self-fulfillment.

Karuna the protagonist of ShobhaDe's *Socialite Evenings* hails from a middle-class family. Initially she works as a model, and then resorts to writing and later turns to making advertisement films. But Karuna's marriage fails, as it was loveless. Her husband to her was an ordinary Indian male, unexciting, uninspiring, untutored. He was not made for introspection. ( 65).The Indian woman's marital life becomes "an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left". The realization that Karuna ultimately comes to is that, there is neither romance nor glory in marriage. Karuna has been trapped into a meaningless marriage as it was said:She had married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time (65).

Karuna becomes repulsive to her husband's compulsive socializing, his horrible safari suits and the gum he constantly chewed. She tried to divert herself with her books besides losing herself in fantasies, crosswords, newspapers and chess. Karuna's marriage lacked the vitality, which she had expected. Very soon she found that her world was quite different from that of her husband's. As a result, Karuna fails to get the required emotional support from her husband and decides to separate from him. She tells her spouse:

I think our marriage was over the day, our awful honeymoon started, we've got nothing going. I don't love- never have. As for you-I really don't know to this day why you choose to marry me. I don't think you even know whom you married. You don't have a clue what sort of woman I am. I'm tired of your smugness, your irritating mannerisms, the way you take me for granted and expect me to fall into your overall scheme of things- I was another one for your well- calculated deals. (185)

She realizes herself as one locked up in a fragile marital knot, and leading a life of emotional frigidity. All meaningful communication between the partners was slowly coming to a standstill. There is not a smile,

laughter, free exchange of thought and ideas, or queries but only silence. All attempts to break this ennui were in vain: It wasn't that I never tried, but there was no question that my husband and I inhabited different planets(68).

Unlike other married women who have practically no choice left but what their husbands will and desire, Karuna fosters independent thoughts. She has her own say and she is ready to choose her own ways. Consequently, Karuna discards the traditional morality expected of a dutiful wife and relishes in an extra marital relationship with Krish. When she gets the divorce from her husband, she moves from place to place seeking a job. She discovers she is pregnant and she fears. She wants to abort her child. She seeks an escape as she leaves her husband's house and starts living with Anjali her friend, who hails from a Jain family. On second thoughts she decides to have the baby. Her friend Anjali then ridicules her views most vehemently and chides her:

Don't be crazy... A baby is lifelong responsibility-look at me. Are you prepared to tie yourself down forever? Get a puppy or a kitten if you are feeling all that motherly, forget about a kid. Besides, you won't be able to handle the scene. You aren't cut out for a single parent situation. You can't go around with an orphan Annie-like kid, with no father on the scene. (222)

The sanctity of marriage and childbearing, which was traditionally considered as the very prerequisites of wifely duties, becomes most insignificant. But the women characters in ShobhaDe's world are unafraid and indifferent to moral codes. Marriage is an aversion in ShobhaDe's heroines. When Karuna is trapped into a meaningless marriage, her husband becomes a complete stranger to her:

We'd lie in there in the bedroom with the dull walls reading our respective magazines. He with the Economist and I with a film rag. If there was absolutely nothing better to do and we ran out of magazines, he'd turn to me and nudge, 'wife- how about it? Neither the words nor the tone did anything to allay the disgust I usually felt. But it was simpler to just get on with the damn thing and have it over and done with as fast as possible. (SE 67)

One day she decides to separate from him, and quits. In the beginning she lives as a paying guest but later goes back to her parent's home as Despande's characters Saru, Indu, Jaya and Sumi do. Karuna imagines that her mother may not entertain her arrival at home. But she notices a change in her mother's attitude. She was more than delighted to see Karuna. And so was her father; for when her father returned, all he said was: Let me just say that our doors are always open to our children (184).

Karuna experiences the valuable support extended to her by the family in her moments of crisis. He had been running away from reality all this while making her existence superficial. How much she had craved for independence, and was defiant of all authority. But now she reckons the importance of the family and how much it meant to her in an hour of need.

Karuna's mother however is anxious about her future. How long she can live as a single separated woman? She urges her to think of marriage, stressing that women cannot live alone and they need a man's protection and that society is cruel to single woman: Society can be very cruel... a woman's real place is in her husband's house-not in her parents'- Take your time but marry. And marry the right one-that is important ... before we die, we want to see you secure and at peace (275-276).

She counsels how a woman's real place is in her husband's home not in her parent's, and urges Karuna to think, take her time to choose someone and marry. She wonders why security should rest with a male. She is convinced that without a husband she is perfectly at peace with herself. She does not want to complicate her life by getting married again. Marriage implicated untold sacrifices. Karuna recalled her mother's words that marriage is merely a question of getting used to change. She thinks differently:

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

While her mother continued to worry about her single status, Karuna refuses to relinquish the idea of marriage

because her marriage lacked any vitality. She had found that her world was quite different from that of her husband's. Men preferred to remain aloof Anjali reminded Karuna that 'Men just feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient women' (47).

The dialogue between Karuna and her mother throws much light on the changing value systems. The institution of marriage does no more carry with it the traditional security. When Karuna argues:

But, mother why does security rests with a man? I feel confident now that I can look after myself. I am earning as much money as many men, 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 any one... I can't make any 'sacrifices'- not now. (276)

After her divorce Karuna tells Anjali that she didn't bring anything with her from her husband's 'home' because nothing belonged to her. Anjali is astonished. She admonishes Karuna: This is not the time for false dignity and pride... Don't be a fool. You are entitled to your things (217). She further elaborates that it was wrong to come out of marriage empty handed:

You need money. I wasn't suggesting you rob the guy. But you are entitled to compensation. You have invested all these many years in marriage-don't you think it's your right to claim something? If I know that family, they 'll cut you off without a dime'. (217-18)

When her husband comes to fetch her she refuses to go back with him realizing that a life of responsibilities was certainly worth living, rather than the unhappy, vacuum of matrimony. Karuna as an emancipated woman is furious when her husband when he comes to her with the proposal of a re-marriage:

And you waited all this while to tell me. Just get the hell out of my house and life. I don't ever want to see you again. I let you in this time but never again. I'll call the cops If you try and invade my home in future. You are even more a worm than I thought. (50)

Whilst her mother continued to worry about her single status Karuna feels complacent. She is self-assured and self-sufficient without a husband to boss around. Here Karuna constructs her own identity to struggle the hierarchal arrangement of societal set up and relationships. She strategies a code of conduct for herself which is free from the restraints of traditional society. In the concluding part of the novel Shobha De emphasizes that in a man-woman relationship, it is not the woman who is to be blamed. The new generation of woman is alerted as they have become acutely aware of the traps in marriage.

#### Works Cited

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