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## Tradition and Modernity in Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings*

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### Abstract

Shobha De's writing gives us a look inside the minds of women and covers a wide spectrum of experiences. She talks on the problems and changes that middle-class Indian women, who make up the vast majority of Indian women, go through. Her main interest is the struggle of women in modern Indian culture. Shobha De, a current feminist voice, has been praised for her realistic portrayal of Indian society. She is a feminist who looks into the life and problems of women. She thinks that Indian women today have a hard time because of old-fashioned ideas that still exist. Marriage has been harmful to the lives of modern Indian women, who have been getting a solid education for the previous 40 years. After British political colonization, a lot of females were sent to many different countries around the world to get a good education. Also, Indian colleges are very focused on giving women a good education. Because of this, women today are starting to challenge the conventional ideals that are hard to change. When the strict rules of society clash with the fresh ideas of Indian women, it creates a form of conflict. The literary works, serving as reflective instruments, depict the prevailing tension. This study aims to elucidate the clash between tradition and modernity in Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings*.

**Keywords:** feminism, conflicts, culture, tradition, modernity

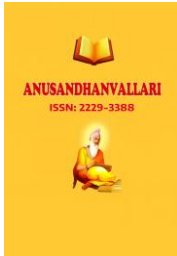
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### Introduction

Indian civilization, from antique period has been very impressionable and open to outside influences. It has actively accepted foreign influences and made changes and readjustments at different times. Even though structural changes have happened numerous times, there is rarely a well-planned loss or difference in the customary order of the civilization. In recent decades, social transformation in India has begun to affect the functional aspect, albeit in a limited manner. Indian women authors in English, such as Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Gita Hariharan and Shobha De, depict the complex, dual and conflicted identities of women arising from the tension between tradition and modernity in their female characters. Their paintings no longer depict women as silent victims and preservers of traditional ideals, but as individuals who vigorously strive to liberate themselves from the constraints of traditional civilization.

### Discussion

Shobha De writes about ladies who are sensitive and conscious of how patriarchal culture is unfair to women. They speak out against their husbands for freedom and independence. The author intentionally depicts her heroines as intellectually and economically autonomous, recognizing the plight of economically dependent women on males. She shows how women have to choose between their family and work lives and how they are at a crossroads of tradition. Her women want to see changes in the traditional and cultural standards, but they



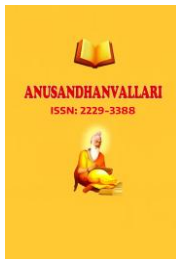
don't want to modify them. They seek to make life possible to live with respect and dignity. Her ladies look for safety in marriage, which they consider as a way to escape the enslavement their parents forced on them. Her protagonists are torn between their commitment to themselves and their families and the customary position of a wife. They don't accept being treated as objects of gratification. They fight and speak out against being victimized and they look for a new place that is fair and equal for both men and women. They believe in following the rules and making deals to keep the peace at home instead of fighting, which is what caused the family unit to break down. Deshpande's heroines, on the other hand, speak up about their problems and frustrations.

Shobha De's creative camera closely examines many parts of current Indian society, such as moral and religious bankruptcy, dishonesty, the rush for wealth and fame and indiscriminate sex and sexual perversion. She depicts the world as she perceives it, shaped by her specific socio-cultural context, rather than how it ought to be. Her imaginary planet, always populated by women, does not exist in fantastical realms or eras; the researcher can perceive their reflections in the surrounding populace. In almost all of her novels, starting with *Socialite Evenings*, Shobha De tries to show the struggle and pain of cosmopolitan elite women who are stuck between tradition and modernity, between patriarchy and the desire for freedom. She does this without taking a feminist stance. They know their rights and they fight for self-actualization by speaking out against the oppressive social and cultural context. Her female characters skillfully navigate these competing ideological forces, although the desire for revolt to attain self-legalization is suppressed by civilization. Because of this, all of the characters in her novels end up getting along and making compromises.

*Socialite Evenings*, the main character, Karuna, is a good illustration of how women deal with mental health issues. She works hard to get the life she wants. She is prepared to exit her life and possibly terminate the pregnancy. Her eagerness to cross the line between life and death demonstrates how much she wants to find her own identity. De's female characters want a life that affords them both physical and mental support. They are tired of what they call "traditional values." Karuna wants to leave her marriage since she doesn't find her spouse engaging or motivating. She says: "He wasn't looking for any simulation, either intellectually or emotionally... (6)"

Shobha De's writing puts more emphasis on sexual liberation than on staying faithful to a spouse. Anjali exemplifies the concept that marriage is exclusive to the affluent classes in *Socialite Evenings*. In a relationship with Abe (Abbas Tyabjee). Anjali is a pervert and Abe is a womanizer. Abe divorces Anjali when he finds out she is cheating on him. Karuna ends her marriage because she needs space, freedom and a way to express herself. She marries Krish so that she can get a divorce from her husband. People don't give marriage and family enough credit and the most important ideas of marriage is often overlooked. The novel talks about marriages that are right and don't have any ties to society.

Shobha De tells actual stories that are still happening in real life. She shows how gender differences, male dominance and women's struggles with tradition and modernization affect their relationships with other people. De's works are very feminist and strongly protest against Indian society, which is run by men and doesn't let women do what they want or live how they want. People think of them as just shadows of males and treat them like they're different. In the work, De seeks to show how Indian women live in a modern, evolving and conflict-ridden Indian city. She is keenly aware of the conflicting pulls of traditions and modern life, Indian and Western ways of living, a woman's need for independence and her need for the future. She shows this tension in her works, notably in the lives of upper-class women. According to Amit G Ramteke, "Karuna emerge as a woman of a strong will power having her own. individualistic approach to life. She is a representative or modern Indian women. consumed by freedom, equality and justice which the feminists have upheld so earnestly and keenly as their guiding principles" (147).



De's *Socialite Evenings* moves around Karuna, a socialite from Bombay, who tries to forget about her failed marriage, broken connections and mentally ill sister by partying in Bombay. The novel depicts the marginalization of women by their spouses through the figure of Karuna and their efforts to subvert traditional conventions. The novel shows us how tradition and modern life are different. Ankita Shukla says: "Shobha De was memorable for her descriptions. De's women range from traditional, subjugated and marginalized to the extremely modern and liberated women." (Shukla, 2).

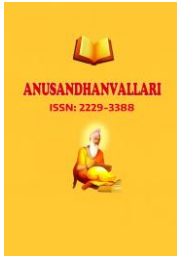
A custom is a tradition or way of doing things that has been passed down through generations. It is a natural and unavoidable element of being human. A lot of how one lives, what a man does and what he believes comes from our parents and grandparents. They then pass these things down to their children. Customs largely shape how we live our personal and social lives, how we practice our religion and how our political and social institutions work. People and culture evolve and so do our customs. People incorrectly think that customs and modern life are at odds with each other. The present moment is a good way to be conscious of how different modern times are from past ones. Contemporary reality often manifests as an alarm bell, although it recognizes that its significance is derived from its connection to historical realities.

In a civilization that isn't changing, modern realities are at battle with traditions. Women in India have been suffering for a long time. They have been subjected to flawed accusations, emotional abuse, disdain, sexual manipulation, subordination and oppression. For hundreds of years, they have been dealing with the same issues. There are some adjustments, but they aren't up to the standards. The last several years have been quite important for seeing how feminism or self-aware people have changed the way women look. A lot of Indian English women novelists have written on these shifts.

Shobha is one among them. She is a modern novelist who knows that women are being pushed out and pushed to the side and she tries to change this pattern through her writing. She is always trying to break up the power of men and give a voice to urban women in India. She believes that women are born free to live as they like. Like men, they have the right to conduct their lives as they see fit. They are shown as a threat to the well-established social order that regards women differently than men and expects women to be chaste. This is definitely wrong. Both should be held to the same standards of morality and responsibility in order to make the society healthy for everyone to live in. But the truth is different. Our society still demands a lot more from women in order to make things better or raise the standard of living. People still think that if women adopt more Western values, the social order will be even more upset.

A woman is the one who keeps the family together. She can bring everyone together morally to keep her family's environment healthy. In some way, it's also true. It's nice that people appreciate her this much. We say hello to the society. But society should also make sure that the respect and expectations it has for her don't make her feel trapped. She should be allowed to live her own life. She must also protect her family's moral standards at the same time. Men are also required to do this. So, it means that the two of them need to understand each other in order for their lives on Earth to be meaningful and important.

In this novel, the researcher analyze how her female characters have tried to break free from traditional norms and live in a society that is quite modern and full of westernized culture. The novel tells the story of Karuna, a well-known Bombay socialite, as she goes from being a clumsy middle-class girl to a strong, independent lady. Karuna is born in a small hamlet in Maharashtra. She doesn't recall much about her childhood, save that her father was stern and her mother didn't care about understanding their daughters. When Karuna gets to Mumbai, her current situation starts to take shape. She decides to be a model at one point. She knows her father will never let her do this, so she asks her mother if she can enter this profession as a career.



These little conversations between Karuna and her mother and sister tell us a lot. One can have a common perception that a woman should marry a good man to be happy and that being a model is just like being a prostitute. It also shows how modern women think differently about marriage, realizing that marrying respectable guys doesn't always lead to a happy and quiet life. At times, it becomes stifling and obstructs the freedom of the women. People might also learn about the religious beliefs of some of the people in the mass today.

The new generation wants everything to make sense. If you can meet their needs and explain why, they will follow you. If not, like Karuna, they will cheat you. If you compel them to follow a religious idea, on the other hand, you will indirectly make them lie to you.

Karuna says this when Anjali talks to Abe about her divorce:

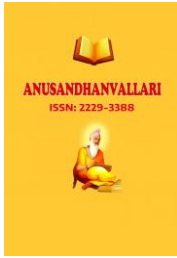
I kept telling her to stick around Abe. 'You are used to him you know what he's all about. How are you sure you'll get a better deal with someone else? And look, what the other man did-ran a mile when he realized you meant business; she wasn't convinced. I even urged her to remain single for a while. 'I can't darling. I need a man. How will I go to the club alone? What about parties and plays and things? I hate to walk into a room without a man next to me. And then, no one will invite me without Abe... or someone. (65)

Karuna goes on to state that they want to live as free women who can make their own choices. Women in Mumbai worked, got married, got divorced and stayed single. This changing reality has inspired Karuna with the fantasy of a free woman, which she learns to love. De is sharing one more stunning titbit about how modern women think: they want to please their spouses. They act like they're wearing masks. To get what women want, they make their husbands think that marrying them was a good thing. By professing to support their husbands, they make them think they are better than they are. When Karuna asks, Anjali says: "It may seem horrible to you. But I don't think I'm doing anything dishonest. I'm not cheating him in any way. I look after his mother, his home, and his needs. Why shouldn't I expect something in return? If I didn't fulfill him in bed-he'd look elsewhere. Maybe go to a prostitute" (87).

One can also understand the universal truth that we must live in reality while accepting the truth that is all around us. One can't keep going on like this forever, taking revenge, playing games with others, wearing masks and so on. One needs to get on with our lives and sail in the boat for a better, happier and more fulfilling life. If one wants to be happy, men and women should treat each other with the same amount of respect and honor. Karuna's last confession in the novel is a witness to it. She adds that being unmarried doesn't make any lady feel better. If a husband doesn't feel and understand his wife, he can't soothe her either.

When ShobhaDe's first novel, *Socialite Evenings*, was out in 1989, it made waves in society. It revealed the world of India's upper class. In *Socialite Evenings*, the women are victims of a patriarchal society and are trying to find their own identity and sense of self. The main character of the novel is Karuna, a well-known socialite from Bombay. She gives up her middle-class past to fit in with the rich. She had been a victim of patriarchal power since she was a child. This novel shows how the rich and bored women of Bombay high society live. They are stuck in loveless marriages and have affairs with other people. They look for the meaning of life in trendy parties, a westernized lifestyle and materialism, among other things. Karuna's divorce and other problems have left her broken, so she starts writing her memoirs to get away from these bad memories. Her memoirs are a hit and she becomes quite famous and a busy socialite. She claims her identity and lives life the way she wants to.

Anjali, Karuna's friend, likewise wants to be her own person and leave her middle-class origins behind. She becomes a hostess for Air India and marries Abbas Tayabji, but she quickly gets unhappy and feels trapped in this relationship. After her divorce from Tayabji, she has a lot of affairs, but she quickly becomes unhappy and disillusioned and turns to spiritualism seeking serenity in her life. Ritu is a beautiful and lively person. She tries



to kill herself since she is unhappy in her marriage and affairs. She goes back to nature after realizing herself. All of these ladies are modern, educated and have the freedom to choose. The novelist talks about family and marriage through the lives of these women. They are stuck in marriages without love and are trying to get out of them. They are on a journey to find out who they are and what makes them unique. They fight against the male-dominated culture and won't accept roles and identities that are allocated to them by men. The novel also has a lot of male characters and shows how they treat women. The novel looks at how women think and feel. When Girish Shridhar, a well-known director, asks Karuna to marry him, her answer shows what she really thinks: "I feel all closed up and insulated. I need little time. I am discovering myself. I enjoyed this little patch of independence. I am reconnecting with my parents-they need me. I am enjoying their presence...don't rush me please" (60).

### Conclusion

Shobha De brings to life the above forecast and the idea of women's place in society. De's ladies are unique since they each have their own identity. They have their own rules about how to behave in public and in private. They are sending a strong message to the conservative patriarchal culture that they will no longer accept being held back. They are upgrading their standards via education and work and the 21st century is absolutely theirs and their freedom. Chansoria, P. A., & Syed, D. S points out: Shobha De has succeeded in the presentation of her viewpoint related to the socialite women of Bombay through the character of Karuna, but Karuna, in our opinion cannot be accepted to be an archetype of women liberation, emancipation and independence. The location of Indian woman cannot be discordant with the Indian cultural traditions and important necessary customs.

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