CHAPTER II

ELEMENTS OF POSTMODERNISM IN SOCIALITE EVENINGS AND STARRY NIGHTS

Section-I

2.1 SOCIALITE EVENINGS

2.1.1 Socialite Evenings the Quest for Unlimited Freedom:

*Socialite Evenings* is Shobha De’s first novel published in 1989. She deals with the issues related to the modern time. The industrial revolution and technological development has affected Indian life in all respect. Along with prosperity, the life of rich class people is entangled in different problems. The women being educated started finding their own ways in terms of livelihood. Their education not only provided them job opportunities but also a kind of freedom that destroyed their married life. In the quest of unlimited freedom and modern concept of socialization, the modern woman got herself involved in extra marital affairs and destroyed her married life. The setting of most of Shobha De’s novels is the modern part of urban India. She was associated with media before becoming the full-fledged writer. It helped her in presenting the inner feelings of her protagonists. She was closely associated with many personalities as an editor of popular magazines of the time. Her *Socialite Evenings* too is not an exception to it and reflects all the trends of modern writers of postmodern period.
2.1.2 Socialite Evenings: Projection of Aristocratic Class of Urban India:

De’s *Socialite Evenings* depicts the life of aristocratic class of the urban part of India. It is a story of Bombay based main protagonist Karuna. She belongs to the middle class family. After entering into the dazzling life of Bombay city, she sets out in search of excessive freedom and in the process she gets herself involved in an extra-marital relationship. Though she develops an extra marital relationship, she is able to keep her married life unharmed. In order to find own identity in the male dominated society she is ready to endure any kind of pains. It portrays Mumbai high society and explores the lives of bored rich housewives trapped in loveless marriages and engaging in ill-fated, extra-marital affairs, smug selfish husbands, fashionable parties, false spiritual leaders, and a portrait of general, moral, spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy and decadence of the elite who have traded their traditional culture for westernization and modernization.

In the novel, Karuna, the protagonist and narrator caught up in a drab boring life from which she desires to escape by writing memoirs. Her memoirs are successful and she achieves a measure of fame and pride in herself as she becomes an active socialite and eventually uses her newly found prominence as celebrity to get herself a position as an advertising copy writer and creator of a television series. In the novel *Socialite Evenings* Karuna is the main protagonist. She is all agog to break-out of such thralldom which compels her to assume the status of the other. A problem child both at home and at school, she declines a dog the traditional path of etiquette and manners. At home, she refused to cower before elders and at school she wore her sash hipster style. As she grows in age there develops in her the emotional urge to identity with the outside world, the
modern crowd, the bewitching and fascinating world of affluent girls who had the lewd and clandestine world of modeling with her secret assignment as the Terkosa Girl. Throughout the novel Karuna figures as a woman who asserts her feminine psyche through protest and defiance. She figures as a woman, not victim. Shobha De deals with the sullenly skewed of art. We do not have here the stereotypes associated with male artistic representations of women. Karuna’s initiation into the fashionable world of modern life begins at Anjali’s fancy place in Malabar Hill. But Anjali accuses Karuna of bitchiness and lechery, her insatiable appetite for sex. This is borne out when Karuna dates with the New Delhi ad film-maker in London. Further her stay in the United States gives her a feeling of superiority and makes her assertive. Karuna, with all her attempts at ego assertion, refuses subscription to stereotypes, to succumb to the hegemony of the malist culture. Socialite Evenings gives us the image of new women at the hands of their husbands. Shobha De pictures the women not only as protagonists but also as motivating factors in the society. She initiates their lives as well as the lives of others in the voluptuously fascinating world of Bombayites. Karuna’s marriage is a failure since it is loveless, joyless and bridgeless. There is no understanding between the husband and wife. She feels that she has married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time. Her husband is just the average Indian husband - unexciting, uninspiring and untutored. He was not made for introspection. The average Indian woman’s conjugal life for her is an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left and marriage is like a skin allergy - an irritant. But she is not afraid to face this irritant, this allergy. She boldly and defiantly encounters it, for she realizes: “marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to” (De,Shobha: 1989: 68)and she gets used to this
stereotyped social institution in the course of time. She detests the stand-offish and
callous attitude of the husbands who often kept themselves busy in drab monotonous
activities – like reading the business pages of *The Times of India*. Despite these laxities, a
husband was above all, a sheltering tree, a rock to the wife. They were not wholly bad or
evil and the wife as a woman was only peripheral being. Karuna says:

> We were reduced to being marginal people. Everything that mattered to us
> was trivialized…roof over our head and four square meals a day. (69)

The subordination of women as housewives stems from a castration-panic on the part of
the husband. The Indian male is presented by Shobha De as a person “terribly threatened
by self-sufficient women.” (69) He is inadequate and incomplete as a husband since he
lacks the traits of an ideal husband. Fear of the loss of domination and control over the
self-affirming wife makes him resort to several defense mechanisms. One of these
strategies is his male chauvinism and power-assertion ventilating in bullying and
committing atrocities upon his wife. But his stupid self-conceit and ego restricts a free
exchange of views among sexes. Karuna inquisitively wonders:

> How could he communicate anything at all to men who perpetually sat
> reading pages of *The Times of India* while concentratedly picking their
> noses? (66)

Karuna learns from Ritu, whom she chances upon at a finance director’s party that “men
like dogs could be conditioned through reward and punishment.” (87) But could she
condition her husband in the like manner. But she was fed up with her husband’s
compulsive socializing, his horrible safari suits and the gum he constantly chewed. She could not turn to anything in such a boring milieu. Crosswords and newspaper chess were other alternatives to utter boredom. She realizes that despite her little acts of protest, she is “a well-trained Indian wife” (54) but she shares the same rational human nature as men do. Karuna is not the toy of man, his rattle, which must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused. The subordination of women in the maleist culture is suggestive of hierarchization of socio-moral values between the sexes. It symbolizes the polarity between activity and passivity, between meek obedience and defiance. Helene Cixous observes:

A male privilege can be seen in the opposition between activity and passivity. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is coupled with the same opposition: activity/passivity. (Cixous, Helen: 1981: 10)

Women are often the symbols of passivity. Helene Cixous further mentions:

Either the woman is passive; or she doesn’t exist. What is left is unthinkable, unthought-of. She does not enter into the opposition; she is not coupled with the father who is coupled with the son. (Ibid: 288)

2.1.3 Treatment to the Woman as a Matter not as a Partner:

Woman is thus reduced to matter, a mere object. This reduction of woman to matter or a commodity is in the main a phallocentric pattern. Karuna’s husband treats her as matter, a mere object subjected to his own will. Karuna’s humorously sarcastic approach to her problems in the patriarchal male culture apparently deconstructs the traditional gender
hostility used to elaborate the polarities of conjugal ties. Karuna undermines male superiority. She loathes her husband’s dwelling in “post-mortems.” She makes an ingenuous declaration about her inner urge to express herself through love:

I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him in Venice. There is a good chance … It’s the Taurean in me that’s surfacing these days. Treat this as a short-term mania that will wear itself out. (186)

It is clear that Karuna has just a formal relationship with her husband. Intimacy between the husband and wife is lacking for Karuna who never calls her husband by his name but derogatorily as ‘Black Label.’ Shobha De resorts to the technique of manipulating language in order to deconstruct the male ego: “the fact that his wife had taken a lover excited him. Resisting – it would have only consumed more time.” (188) Women in Shobha De’s novels symbolize the overpowering materialism and the lack of spirituality that characterizes modern age. With the crumbling of moral and ethical values there is an inner conflict which drives the modern Indian women to seek shelter in different identities for momentary solace. One of the most notable features of these women is they lack an identity. But the whole blame cannot be laid on women only because in Shobha De’s novels there are type of men who use and abuse women and then discard them. In Socialite Evenings one encounters a liberal Indian husband who allows his Indian wife to go abroad and get herself screwed once for all as the last gesture of good will. From the individual, it comes to the family. It is the family which is the centre of deviance. Subhash Chandra regards family’s disintegration is the instrument of degeneration of Socialite Evenings. Anjali throws off the traditional conventions of moral values and
seductively rises to the social status of the upper classes. She enacts a marriage of choice with Abe, an experienced rake with a wild reputation and rejoices in orgiastic acrobatics. Having a passion for illimitable sex, she has frequent sex encounters. Be he the die-hard rake Abe or the innocent Karan, she is after the desire of the body, the itching of the sensations. Karuna too discards the dogmatic rules of a hackneyed and worn-out tradition for sustaining and cherishing her extra-marital relationship with Krish. Even she does not hesitate to restrain her husband from a week-long sexual orgy with Krish in Rome.

Anjali, Karuna and Ritu are the proverbial succubi who reign supreme in their world of licentious and unrestricted libido. In *Socialite Evenings*, Shobha De articulates her own inclination towards vamp art and displays the troika of female characters who symbolize absolute freedom of womankind from all forms of patriarchal inhibitions. Karuna rejects the hierarchization of male values where the female factor is reduced to a negative, and almost nullified. Her statements express her desire for the affirmation of her feminine consciousness. It is in fact a search on her part for the genuine female self in a male-centered world. But hers is not a traditional one. It is an esoteric quest, something weird and grotesque on the part of an Indian woman. But Karuna never bothers about the social repercussions her esoteric quest might entail. She is isolated from the traditional Indian heritage and its social implications. Taking up a nonconformist stance, she adopts a radical feminist point of view all agog to destroy the sex/gender system – the real source of women’s oppression – and to create a new society in which men and women are equals at every level of existence. With dissident women like Karuna and Anjali oppressive gender roles will be deconstructed and women will take up a revolutionary role, flouting androgyny. A new generation of wild, lusty and wandering women like those of De’s
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female protagonists will be created who would prefer to identify themselves as radical lesbian feminist separatists. Pornography in the novel becomes the symbol and symptom of the female defiance of a male-regulated female sexuality. Her women suffer in an androgynous world for they do not cherish genuine passions but only plastic passions which make them passive without a sense of purpose living in a frustrating world of anxiety, guilt, hostility, bitterness, boredom and resentment. These women cast off the conventional sense of morality, the old, tired and repressive sexual moves and revel in the erotic celebration of the body. Thus Shobha De’s novel Socialite Evenings shows the image of new woman against predatory male-dominated society. On the other hand, her vamp ideology of feminism provides no redemption for the deviant and fallen women who in their frantic struggle to escape male-domination and attain individuality, meet with failure and are victimized in one way or the other. In enacting the drama of seduction and betrayal in her foray against patriarchal structures, the glamorous vamp in De’s novels, may end up being as seductively treacherous to women as to men. A woman in Indian society marries not just the man but also his family and subsequently loses her identity in marriage as well as relinquishes her freedom and sets about pleasing everybody. But the new generation of women with their new-found release from matrimonial bondage adopts different perspectives and revolt against the old order. De’s women are such liberated individuals in search of a niche in their lives.

2.1.4 Focus on Modern Husband-wife Relationship in Socialite Evenings:

Shobha De, in her novels, beginning from Socialite Evenings to Second Thoughts, seems to be caught in the cobweb of westernization and modernization. Her concept of new
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women seems to be her concept of modern women as well as Western women. In India woman is the representative of goddess. She plays different roles altogether and that is the sublimity in her nature. But in modern age, women have become more conscious regarding their human rights. They do not simply want to be the better-halves of their male counterparts; rather they are conscious for their own individual identity and recognition in society.

In Socialite Evenings, Shobha De seems to present the various consequences of tradition of a middle class family to which Karuna and Anjali belong. Karuna and Anjali both are married women. But both of them are highly ambitious. Karuna leads a wild reckless life although she belongs to strictly traditional middle class family. She jumps into the field of modeling against the desire of her father. She joins the socialite circle in Mumbai. She marries for money. But her ambition is not realized because of her wrong choice. Her husband is the typical representative of an Indian husband who does not believe in the freedom of women as a wife. In the mood of desperation, Karuna easily goes in the arms of Krish who is the friend of her husband. She establishes sexual relationship with Krish without any hesitation. Her relationship with Krish brings divorce between her and her husband. It is beyond the traditional and moral norms that married woman goes in the arms and sits in the lap of other man for her emotional and sexual gratification. If this happens, there occurs moral disorder and anarchy in human life. Tradition plays a very important role in stopping such illicit relations in society. L. Sonia Ningthoujam thinks the same: “This is an unthinkable step to any self-respecting Indian woman of a conservative background”. (Ningthoujam,99) Karuna wants to become independent not only economically but psychologically and emotionally. She becomes
the mistress of Ranbir Roy, who is a well-known journalist, for her there is no importance of family. Anjali also follows the footsteps of Karuna. She develops illicit relations with Abbe Tyabji, a rich businessman. She thinks that her marriage with Tyabji provides luxurious life to her. She also provides many young girls to Tyabji for his sexual satisfaction. It is quite opposite to the nature of a woman that wife is not jealous to these women who are the part of her husband's bedroom. Anjali has many lovers. She is reckless and very candid in her sexual behaviour. She picks up many affairs. She becomes the mistress of a Frenchman. After leaving Frenchman, she marries Kumar, a rich businessman. Man and money are the hobbies of Anjali. Thus there is no moral sense in the life of Kruna and Anjali. Only for the sake of liberty in their life, they alternate men many times. For them, there is no meaning of marriage and family which are two great traditional institutions in Indian society. L. Sonia Ningthoujam remarks once again:

To these women marriage and family do not count. All is for convenience and fun. All they crave for is unlimited liberty. This is the image of the new woman that Shobha De creates in her novels. (Ningthoujam: 2006: 103)

In Socialite Evenings, Shobha De, through the presentation of the relationship between Karuna and her husband and also Anjali and her husband Abe, wants to show the deteriorating aspects of husband-wife relationships in the context of new emerging living perspectives. Karuna is the victim of her own cobweb because she feels marginalized in the hands of her husband all the time. In the presentation of Karuna and her husband, Shobha De portrays a woman who wants to run all her relations according to her own choice. There is no understanding between the husband and the wife and she feels that she has not married a proper man. Her husband is just the average Indian husband - a man
of passivity who lacks imagination and inspirations. She realizes the bitter truth with him in these words: “Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It is just something to get used to.” (68) Karuna detests the callous and cruel attitude of her husband. She also does not like the unromantic and passive attitude of her husband who is always busy in reading newspapers and spending days in monotonous activity. On the other hand, she finds a real shelter under the roof of her husband for which Indian husbands are known and recognized for. She says about her dual situation without any hesitation:

We were reduced to being marginal people. Everything that mattered to us was trivialized. The message was "you don't really count, except in the context of my priorities". It was taken for granted that our needs were secondary to theirs. And that in some way we ought to be grateful for having a roof over our head and four square meals a day. (69)

The relationship between Karuna and her husband does not attend the proper height because it lacks the sublimity which is one of the required components in making husband-wife relationship successful. Marriage in their case is totally meaningless because it brings hollowness, cruelty and real domination. Karuna's husband is a man of flattering nature, a man of duplicacies. On the other hand, the relationship between Anjali and Abe has some different problems. Anjali has a dominating partner. She controls the emotions and passions of her husband. She understands the energy, desire, ambition, etc., of her husband. She is in search of a suitable life-partner. When she got satisfied with Abe and found Abe useless after sometime, she does not hesitate to leave and reject him and comes in the arms of Mr. Kumar. Here Anjali is more conscious than Karuna in her
own terms. Ritu's relationship with her husband is something different. Ritu exploits her sexual break through her female potentiality, her female charm, her female body, her romantic attitude, etc., in order to keep her husband within her reach. She controls her 'husband with female superiority. She tells Karuna about her strategy how she manages to control her husband:

Make them feel you have done them a favour by 'marrying them… Make them feel insecure. Let them think you will walk out on them if they don't toe the line. That is what keeps them in their place. (86)

Ritu tells Karuna once again: “Men like dogs could be conditioned through reward and punishment.”? (87) Anyway, Karuna's marriage was definitely on the rocks. She was utterly bored and unfulfilled by the husband's compulsive socializing, his horrible safari suit and the gum he constantly chewed. She realized her painful situation because she has nothing to do in spite of keeping the house well decorated. Her life becomes devoid of charm and fascination. She suffers a lot and her extra-marital relations with Krish and Girish cannot be the result of Karuna's lust, but at the same time her husband's passiveness and cold mindedness are equally responsible to force her to embrace Krish earlier and Girish later. Here we find the relationship between the husband and the wife breaks because the husband fails to read the wife's mind. But on the other hand, Karuna's post-marital relationship with Ranbir Roy is not the compensation she desires after getting rid of her husband. Karuna is isolated from the traditional Indian heritage and its social implications. She rejects the importance of male values in her life. She is conscious of her own identity and this sense of identity makes her realize the futility of relationship especially with male in which there is no question of love, affection, understanding,
devotion, respect, confidence and trust. She and all the women portrayed - Anjali, Ritu, Swati, etc., are not hesitative to establish sexual relationship with many male members of the high profile aristocratic society. This is a social and moral disorder and it has been conceived and viewed by Shobha De as ‘candidness or openness' associated with the empowerment of women in the wake of modern society. It is a reason that the relationship between Karuna and her husband and also Anjali and Abe has failed to realize the proper dimension.

2.1.5 Projection of Man-woman Relationship in Socialite Evenings:

Shobha De's presentation of man-woman relationship starts from her very first novel Socialite Evenings. In this novel, there are two female characters Karuna and Anjali, both belong to middle class morality-are not hesitative in establishing so called illicit relationship with other males apart from their husbands. Karuna - is a typical married woman but her married life is not happy because marriage brings futility and frigidity in her life. Having been dissatisfied with her husband, she establishes relationship with Girish Sridhar, who offers her a role in his movie 'Shakuntala'. Karuna grabs the opportunity and she becomes very close to Girish Sridhar. She also establishes relationship with Randhir Roy who is a married man. But Randhir Roy teaches her how to believe in herself at the moment of pressure and frustration. Karuna's relation with three different men Girish, Randhir Roy and Krish apart from her husband is quite suggestive because it shows the different stages in her life. Girish was a filmmaker, Randhir Roy was a journalist and Krish was a high profile man. It seems that Karuna wants to establish relationship with these three men in order to stabilize herself in the social perspectives of the cosmopolitan culture. She would like to maintain her dignity in
social life by sacrificing her morality. But she is aware of this fact also. She says to Girish, one of her lovers:

I feel all closed up and insulated. I need little time. I am discovering myself. I enjoyed his little patch of independence. I am reconnecting with my parents-they need me. I am enjoying their presence... Don't rush me please. (255-256)

She realizes the fact that she cannot be happy in the context of extra-marital relationship. She is of view that in Indian context, any women cannot live alone. There is no life for women without the roof of a man. Only economic or social status brings nothing in the life of a woman. She realizes the fact that she cannot be happy in her relationship with Girish who was a filmmaker and has given breakthrough in the coveted film industry. She says to Girish Sridhar:

A woman cannot live alone. It is not safe. We are here today—but who knows about tomorrow? A woman needs a man's protection. (275)

Karuna's relationship with Krish is nothing but a torrid romance and sex game. Her relationship with Krish does not continue for a longer period because she finds a sense of hollowness and timidness in him. Krish was the friend of Karuna's husband. He is a flirt kind of man. He is already married and he has habit of establishing relationship with many women. Finally, she breaks from Krish also. Now she has been divorced by her husband, she rejects Krish, Randhir Roy and Girish Sridhar. She enjoys the full freedom finding herself in new situations. On the other hand, Anjali who is the friend of Karuna is married to Abe. Anjali has several involvements with her male friends. She makes wild sexual adventures with the Belgium photographer. After her divorce from Abe, she looks
for a wealthy companion who might fulfill her dreams by providing her sexual
gratification and much money and luxurious life-style. Anjali gets such man in the form
of Kumar Bhandari. She establishes relationship with Kumar but their relation cannot
ever last when the passion in her decreases. There is another woman Ritu, who in spite of
being a married woman is involved in post-marital relations with Gul and his friends. Gul
is an underworld don and a smuggler. Ritu's relation with Gul turns her into a mere pomp
and show whose duty is to procure women for Gul and his friends. In the mood of utter
dejection, Ritu becomes frustrated, develops habit to consume drugs and becomes a high
profile prostitute. Shobha De is very critical of the role of new women in modern society.
She is perhaps of the view that independence should not come for the sake of loss of
moral values, cultural outlook and ethical sense of human life. She ironically exposes
those women who would like to get freedom in their private lives by surrendering
themselves morally and intentionally. L. Sonia Ningthoujam remarks on such women's
extra-marital relationship in these words:

The wild adventures of these modern society women clearly reflect the
tendency in the new women exposed to affluence and extra-marital
relationships and their impact on their family life and children. It is a clear
warning to both the wife and the husband to bear in mind the possible
influence of their wild aspirations on their children and the society.

(Ningthoujam: 2006: 110)

The above mentioned criticism is quite appropriate in the cases of man-woman
relationships depicted in Socialite Evenings apart from husband-wife relationship. For
instance, Karuna and Anjali are not happy after being divorced from their respective
husbands. Relationships between man and woman is the relationship between two emotions, two souls, two hearts and two bodies, it is not merely the sex and passion which play an important role.
Section-II

2.2 STARRY NIGHTS

2.2.1 Starry Nights as Conflict between Tradition and Modernity:

In her novel *Starry Nights*, Shobha De has intentionally presented the conflict between tradition and modernity in the behaviour of mother in the character of Amma who is the mother of Aasha Rani. In India or in any country, mother is a symbol of sacrifice and mother does everything for the moral upliftment, cultural development and welfare of her children. The role of mother in the shaping of child is extremely important for many reasons. There is a great tradition of motherhood in India. But in *Starry Nights*, Amma's role in her daughter's life is quite opposite to the traditional and cultural demands. Amma lacks the moral sense and she does not hesitate to use the charming and fascinating personality of her daughter to earn money in Bombay. She sells the virginity and chastity of her daughter to earn money, name and fame. She produces her daughter Aasha Rani before several producers, directors and other rich and wealthy people of name and fame for their sexual gratification. Here we find a great change in the outlook of a mother who has changed herself according to the demand of the time. Amrna is not able to save the character of her own daughter because for her there is no scope of moral value in human life. For her, morality is the aspect of the past, money is the matter of present. On the other hand, Aasha Rani learns the bitter lessons of living in docile world from her experiences which she shares from her mother. She succeeds in her life in film industry by using her body as a 'tool'. Here, she begins to believe not in her talent but in the charm
of her body. She would like to catch the attention of the producers, actors and directors by wearing discotheque dresses and showing the charm and glamour of her body. She learns from her mother that the beautiful, charming and fascinating body of the woman is the real weakness of a man. Aasha Rani also wants to exploit this fact. But at the same time she is also aware of her moral disintegration of her character. She confesses before Kishenbhai, a film financer: “You financed and produced my first film Kishenbhai, but you extracted payment from my body.” (De, Shobha: 1991:236) Shobha De shows the loss of moral sense in the midst of modernity. It was a time when guardians and parents thought beyond their imagination to guide their children, especially their daughters to opt career in the film industry. It was a general belief that film industry was not meant for cultural people rather it was meant for low profile people as they thought. But now it has been observed that majority of parents are ready to make their children heroes and heroines because they are not untouched by the glamour of film industry. It was a time that no girl and woman from a decent traditional and cultural family would think of joining Bollywood or film industry by risking their chastity and character. It is the matter of the past. The rise of Aasha Rani in the world of glamour has put many questions before the critics. How can it be justified? The selling of human body can only be the ladder of success! It is beyond the great Indian tradition. But Aasha Rani does the same for getting immense success in her life. Her transformation from a simple innocent girl to an experienced complex personality is the symbol of the transformation from simplicity to complexity and from cultural upliftment to moral disintegration. Her case is not only the case of feminism but also the case of disorientation and distortion which are now ready to destroy the cultural and traditional fabric of Indian society. Can she be called the
real representative of 'modern women' in India? It is one of the most conflicting questions of discussion.

In *Starry Nights*, not only Aasha Rani but several male characters have been presented in conflicting situations in order to show the conflict between traditionalism and modernism. Since Shobha De is a reactionary writer, she does not hesitate to show how this male dominated society is extremely responsible for the women's anger. Shobha De does not believe in the disintegration and distortion in the traditional image of the women. She believes in the fact if man can marry thrice and keep many mistresses at a time why not women? She believes in the fact that women are doing the same thing by changing their lovers every day. They do not succumb before their husbands and are involved in post-marital relations without any sense of remorse or guilt. If Akshay Arora, Kishenbhai, Seth Amirchand, Abhijeet Mehra, Jamie Phillips, Jojo, etc., are busy in using women's body and glamorous outlook, why not women like Aasha Rani, Sudha Rani, Amma, Malini Arora, Linda, Nikita, etc., do the same thing. For Shobha De, it is not the cultural distortion, moral degradation and social distortion. It is an inevitable reaction against the male domination. But Aasha Rani does not learn the lessons from her mother's earlier mistakes. She wants to make her own daughter Sasha-A Golden Girl of the Silver Screen. That is the world in which glamour and fascination play an effective role to sense the fragrance of modernity by diverting from the traditional and cultural values. Shobha De writes about Aasha Rani's daughter Sasha's prospects in her life:

She would rule the film world through her daughter who had the makings of a star. An unforgettable star. The Golden Girl of the silver screen! Oh yes, Sasha would be tomorrow's Lover Girl. (234)
2.2.2 The Lesbian Relationships in Starry Nights:

Shobha De seems to be presenting some of the conflicting factors which are now ready to shade the age-old traditional fabric of Indian society. She does not hesitate to present the lesbian relationships in Starry Nights. Even though lesbianism or sapphism or tribadism existed in India from the time of antiquity but the typical traditional and cultural society of India does not accept this any time. But in modern age female homosexuality is occurring frequently and the female sex workers are in favour of constitutional rights for the same. From time to time, several petitions in favour of female homosexuality or lesbianism have been filed in the Honourable Supreme Court. Since lesbianism is frequently practical in the different parts of the world, the time is not far away when it would also become the part of Indian traditional society in future. Especially in metropolitan culture, lesbianism has been practiced without any hiding and we read in newspapers and observe in electronic media about the several cases of women-women marriage or the lover-beloved relationship between two women or two girls. In literature, it seems that writers are not hesitative in narrating the several stories of lesbianism. Shobha De once again proves reactionary in dealing with the theme of lesbianism in her novels. In her novel Starry Nights, we find an elaborate description of the relationship between Aasha Rani and her journalist friend Linda who exploits Aasha Rani for her satisfaction of clamouring impulses.

In Starry Nights, Shobha De describes several sexual relationships of Aasha Rani in details but her relationship with Linda has been given in full detail in order to show how great Indian traditional setup and values are in state of demolition. According to the reformers, lesbianism is totally against the natural proceeding of human relationships and
human behaviour. It is an art of sycophancy and it is a serious kind of mental, psychological and sexual deprivation. But *Starry Nights* is full of the descriptions of lesbianism which might provide pleasure to the readers but it is a serious threat to the moral order in the society.

The relationship between Aasha Rani and Linda is against the traditional norms. Aasha Rani is a celebrity and Linda would like to test the fragrance of her body for her own sexual gratification. Shobha De frequently writes about their lusty and sexual involvements:

Linda's hands were in Aasha Rani's hair, expertly undoing the clasp. Her fingers began massaging her neck as once again she bent over her to kiss her, saying, "Open your mouth; let me taste your tongue. Your tongue looked so sexy and pink - relax baby, relax. You will love it. Just leave it all to me. Trust me. (79)

In the beginning Aasha Rani does not show any interest in the advances of Linda because she considers it as unnatural and against the human values. But gradually she also enjoys the same as Linda:

Her hands moved from Aasha Rani's neck to her breasts. She kept kissing her gently, probing her mouth with an eager tongue. Reaching under Aasha Rani's shirt she unhooked her bra: Aasha Rani tensed and tried to cover her breasts. "Don't stop me, it will be beautiful. Like nothing you have known before," Linda whispered. Her kissing was more passionate now and her fingers rested on Aasha Rani's taut nipples. "Look, you want me. Your
body can't lie." Her head moved down till her mouth found Aasha Rani's breasts. (79)

Now, Aasha Rani began to find pleasure in her involvement with Linda. They would like to get sheer joy in this act. Both of them do not need man for their physical fulfilment; rather they are the real substitute for each other in their sexual satisfaction:

There was no resistance left any more. Aasha Rani's entire body was floating - her mind was adrift. She let her arms drop as Linda's warm thigh wedged itself between hers and her hand moved between Aasha Rani's legs. Close your eyes let me do to you what no man could have done. Let me make you come like you have never come before. Stay loose, stay with me, you will forget men; you will forget everything you have known before. My hands, my mouth, my tongue, my thighs will set your body on fire. Enjoy it... (79)

Here we find that it seems to be an unnatural act and beyond the average men's imagination but both Aasha Rani and Linda would like to enjoy their involvement. Their joy increases every time they are involved. Linda says that this is the real love which a woman can get in her life. She also says that there is no need of man for pleasure in their life. She says to Aasha Rani:

This is love understand? This is love-making, not what those bastards do to our bodies." Aasha Rani was lulled to sleep by Linda's fingers stroking her. Yes, she thought, this is what it should be tender, beautiful and erotic: In a way it could never be with a man. (80)

Lesbianism is not only against the religious, moral and traditional beliefs but it is also unnatural in respect of scientific validity. It may be called an act of development
according to the activists. But biologists and scientists think it is totally against the scientific validity. Alfred C. Kinsey writes about homosexuality and lesbianism in these words:

The impression that infra-human mammals more or less confine themselves to heterosexual activities is a distortion of the fact which appears to have originated in a man-made philosophy, rather than in specific observations of mammalian behaviour … In actuality, sexual contact between the individuals of the same sex is known to occur in practically every species of mammal which has been extensively studied. (Kinsey, Alfred C.: 1965: 448)

2.2.3 Minimized Importance of Man in Sexual Relationships:

In this novel Shobha De seems to minimize the importance of man in sexual relationships. She is of view that if man is cruel and inhuman in his attitude towards woman and if woman can provide the same pleasure by involving herself with other woman - Is there any harm in such human relationship? That is why, Linda, who seems to be the real spokesman in the novel seems to justify her act which may be against the traditional values. Linda's act challenges the authoritarian glimpse of man that woman need no man as her bed partner in near future. But if it happens frequently what will happen to humanity!

In her second novel *Starry Nights*, Shobha De has presented the relationship between Aasha Rani and her foreign husband Jamie Phillips Gay in different manner. Aasha Rani is a typical product of Bollywood world. In the beginning, she is the victim of poverty, her rise and fall as a star can be the story of any film in Bollywood. Aasha Rani is the illegitimate daughter of some Bollywood producer or filmmaker. In the beginning, her
name was Viji. When her father deserts her family she has to suffer from deprivation and poverty. In order to make her survival, she jumps into the world of low profile films where there is immense opportunity for innocent girls like her who have not been aware with the real facts of that world. Aasha Rani becomes a star. During her career in Bollywood, she realizes the real truths of that world. Her physical exploitation starts when she comes in contact with Kishenbhai, a reknowned underworld mafia who is fond of making illicit relationship with so many women like Aasha Rani. She marries Jamie Phillips when she was at the peak of her career. Her decision to marry Jay makes her happy for some time, but her happiness could not ever last for a longer period as she makes a decision to return to India from New Zealand. She realizes that her potential as an actress cannot be realized in New Zealand because the inborn artist in her always makes her conscious to make attempts to flower her career in the world of Bollywood.

Jamie is a young man and he is the fan of Aasha Rani. He has been attracted by Aasha Rani not because Aasha Rani is beautiful and has sexual appeal. He falls in love with Aasha Rani because she is an Indian and his grandfather was posted in India during the British regime. He proposes Aasha Rani for marriage and she accepts his proposal as a real gift. Gita Barua writes at this juncture:

The young man, Jamie Phillips, while in London, had an affair with an Air India hostess who was Aasha Rani’s fan and along with her; he had seen each and every film of her's many a time on video. Jamie is attracted by Aasha Rani not only because she is sexy but also because of her being an Indian, for his grandfather was posted in India during the British rule. He proposes marriage to her and she accepts it. (Barua, Geeta: 1995: 174)
The relationship between Aasha Rani and Jamie is happy one because for the first time in her career she got a man who rightly understands her character, her desire, her wish, her ambition and her passion. She lives along with her husband in New Zealand for five years. She gives birth to a beautiful girl Sasha. The real misfortune begins in her career, when she decides to return India via London in order to make attempts to establish herself as a star in Bollywood. Here also her husband Jamie leaves her to decide wherever she can go as she likes. We cannot blame Jamie Phillips at any stage for her downfall. Gita Barua writes once again:

Jamie sympathetically leaves her to decide her own way of life and to be near her ailing fathers who now at the far end of his life wants to own up the family he had deserted. (Ibid: 174)

2.2.4 Husband-wife Relationships in Modern Society:

The relationship between Akshay Arora and her wife Malini Arora has also been portrayed in the novel in order to highlight the problems occurring especially in husband-wife relationships in modern society. Akshay Arora is an established person in the film industry. In spite of the fact that he is a married man, he does not hesitate to establish extra-marital relation with Aasha Rani, Akshay Arora's relationship with his wife Malini does not bloom because he is the real bastard in the film industry who would not hesitate to use several women as his bed partners. Akshay Arora is ready to change his religion in order to marry Aasha Rani without divorcing his wife Malini, Aasha Rani is also ready to approve his plan. Aasha Rani says to Seth Amirchand about her real love for Akshay: “You don't understand Sethji. I love this man. I really do. I want to marry him. Bear his child”. (105)Here we can say that Aasha Rani is the real culprit in pouring poison in the
married life of Akshay Arora and his wife Malini. Shobha De in the portrayal of the relationship between Akshay Arora and Malini, once again highlights the problems occurring in the married life in high profile aristocratic society.

2.2.5 Sex as a Tool to Achieve Success and Exploitation of Female in Bollywood:

In *Starry Nights*, Shobha De deals with the rise and fall of Aasha Rani, one of the most penetrative characters created by her. Aasha Rani is an unrivaled beauty of Bollywood stardom. She is quite frank in her approach towards life. Her relationship with producers, directors, actors, cameramen, choreographers, high society celebrities and other non-filmy people is presented in the realistic manner in the novel. Aasha Rani learns the first lesson of human relationships in terms of sexual exploitation in her very early age when she was only fifteen year old. Her mother Amma forced her to establish sexual relationship with many people in order to earn more and more money because Amma was a dejected and rejected wife and also a victim of male dominated world. The childhood exploitation is always a nightmarish in her life because she is not able to come out from those clumsy sexual experiences of her early childhood. Her journey from Viji to Aasha Rani is quite suggestive because it involves her relationship with many men from time to time. Aasha Rani’s relationship with Kishenbhai, who was a film producer, has made her suffer a lot because Kishenbhai exploited the beauty of Aasha Rani in clumsy manner. After experiencing physical relationship with Kishenbhai, Aasha Rani gets the heinous attitude for those high-profile people who do not hesitate to do such things even with those girls of the age of their own daughters. When she comes before the camera for the first time in the presence of Kishenbhai, her feelings are quite typical because she faces the torrid experiences and she turns a blind eye before such people who are emotionless
for the sake of modernism and artificial life. Even though her mother wants to make her a successful film star but this success at the sake of selling her body to someone is not appropriate. The role of her mother is quite important because she is the real culprit. She becomes dumb and deaf before her daughter's rejection of such kind of experiences:

Kishenbhai had come over swiftly to Aasha Rani's side and said softly, "M.D. has a room upstairs-go with him. He will feed you. M.D. is an important man. Treat him nicely. He can help your career. Don't create a scene or anything. All you have to do is...is ... what you do with me ... bas. It will be O.K. Tomorrow morning I will come and take you home." Aasha Rani had pleaded with her eyes and looked beseechingly at Amma-who would simply averted hers. (27)

Aasha Rani's relationship with her mother brings a lot of questions. Mother is the symbol of sacrifice, mother teaches the first lessons of morality, cultural values' and ethical sense of life. But here, we find a real change in such a mother like Amma who has no feelings even for her daughter and even she forces her to jump into the world of sex and underworld. According to many critics, the standard of morality in Shobha De's woman has emerged out of woman's excessive exposure to westernized education, wealth, power and fame. There is an emerging new morality especially in the cosmopolitan culture which has sensed the role of wealth and power in substantial manner. Such women have no sense of morality in establishing illicit relationship with people like Kishenbhai, Seth Amirchand, Akshay Arora, Abhijeet Mehra, Jojo, etc., in order to achieve luxurious life as it happens in the case of Aasha Rani.
Aasha Rani's relationship with Seth Amirchand brings further frustration and exploitation in her life. Seth Amirchand is a typical womanizer and a rich politician. Amirchand makes use of many women belonging to Bollywood. Like many aspiring heroines, Aasha Rani also feels proud and privileged to go in the arms of Seth Amirchand. Shobha De writes:

She feels transported into a hallucinatory world. She was weightless and floating. Her head was full of colours and sounds. Her senses had been heightened to an extent that she experienced no pain even when the Shethji entered her savagely from behind and whipped her with a small leather thong. She was far away in some distant world, listening to bird calls and looking at a dozen rainbows. (61)

Aasha Rani's relationship with Akshay Arora brings out many facets of her personality. Akshay Arora is a married man but there is a sense of hollowness in his relationship with his wife Malini Arora. Akshay Arora comes in contact with Aasha Rani at the Muhurat of his film. Akshay Arora exploits Aasha Rani too much. Her relationship with Akshay Arora is not welcomed by Malini Arora. She beats Aasha Rani but Aasha Rani freely establishes physical relationship with Akshay Arora. When Aasha Rani proposes Akshay Arora for marriage, he declines. This refusal makes her emotionally-broken and she attempts suicide. She asks Akshay Arora to become Muslim because Muslim religion permits two or three marriages at a time. Aasha Rani is also not in favour, but for the sake of love, she is prepared to do so:

You are so stubborn and so stupid. Just forget it. Besides I don't want to become a Muslim. I believe in my religion. I don't want to give up my
faith. I was born a Hindu. I want to die a Hindu. I want to be cremated, not buried. (108)

The refusal of the proposal made by Aasha Rani to Akshay Arora is quite symbolic of the human relationship in the modern context. Man-woman relationship is so sensitive that it cannot ever last until and unless there is sense of respect, morality and understanding. In the case of Aasha Rani-Akshay Arora relationship, sex and money play a very important role and it comes under the category of illicit relationship which bounds to be failed. Aasha Rani's relationship with Jojo who is a film director is quite suggestive in her life. Jojo is a married man. When his wife comes to know about his involvement with Aasha Rani, she becomes crazy and she considers Aasha Rani as the destroyer of family and marriage. Jojo, a typical director, directs not only the film but also the lives of several actresses like, Aasha Rani by establishing illicit relationship with them. In each and every relationship Aasha Rani's body has been used all the time.

Thus, in *Starry Nights*, Aasha Rani's relationship with many men has been projected in order to reveal the truth of high-profile and aristocratic culture which is emerging in the metropolitan cities. Shobha De brings out that there is no solution and no alternative to the problems. Indian woman like Aasha Rani is bound to suffer in the context of such relationships.

2.2.6 Conclusion:

Thus, Shobha De provides no solutions or alternatives to the problems which the Indian woman faces in the androcentric society. The path of liberation chosen by her heroines is also fraught with frustration, mental break-down and disasters. Shobha De, in her both these novels has presented the image of modern Indian woman and her problems. The
modern from the urban Indian society has been presented as a bold woman. But in her portrayal of these characters she has also presented them as violating the Indian culture and shown them as involving in the extra-marital affairs. Shobha De has come up with the new emerging morality especially in the cosmopolitan culture in which the wealth and power have the substantial weightage. De has reveled in a very bold manner the culture of the metropolitan cities of India during the postmodern era. She has presented the man woman relationship in a very sensitive way. The techniques employed by her too are modern one. She reveals the inner problems of the Indian women in these novels. De has used psychoanalytical technique for revealing the inner happenings of her characters. Many of the critics did not approve her way of writing and her novels were not considered up to the marks, but the readers do appreciate her writings and rank Shobha De among the outstanding novelists of the time.
WORKS CITED:


