Chapter 4

TRADITION Vs MODERNITY
A tradition is a ritual belief that in the form of values passes down from generation to generation within a society. The tradition that is maintained in the present has its origins in the past. It also includes the ideas which are mostly considered as useful and socially meaningful. Traditions can persist and evolve for thousands of years. The word 'Tradition' is derived from the Latin word 'tradere' which literally means to transmit, to hand over, to give for safe keeping. Tradition has a very strong hold over Indian society from the time immemorial and new traditions continue to appear with changing times. Traditions are often presumed to be ancient, unalterable and deeply important and are required for a practice by future generations.

Tradition is often contrasted with modernity, particularly in terms of the society. Modernity can be defined as those sets of ideas or beliefs which are ever flowing and evolving like a stream. It relies on an 'expressive' model of communication in which each person is a unique self and this interior uniqueness finds its expression, to a certain extent through the act of communication with other unique selves. Modernity aims towards a progressive force promising to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality. This rationalization sometimes may have negative and dehumanizing effect on modern society when it is taken only for the sake of progress.
When both the terms are discussed in a social setup, traditions represent the actual identity of a particular society while getting rid of them is supposed to be a sign of modernity. Traditions quite often, keep us united but modernity usually takes us apart from each other. A tradition implies an established method or practice; a belief or custom passed on to us by our ancestors. Much of what we do today has its roots in the past. Modernism is in total contrast with the ideas or methods of the traditions. Modernism is also necessary as we must adapt ourselves with the changing times else we shall deprive ourselves of the opportunity to make any progress or development. The world has to move on. Hence, in every era, there is the presence of the conflict between the traditional and the modernism.

Modernism is basically a modern (European/Western) concept which emphasizes on individuality, success, competition, jealousy, revenge and above all self-centredness. In the west, Modernity is also a tradition which forces individuality and does not entertain the sociability concern of the Asian Stance. Their social construct is composed of individuals who perform or try to achieve anything as a single unit. But in Indian social set-up every single unit is brought out collectively to achieve any desired end. Thus, the concept of modernity in India is accepted with a contrast from the west though its influence can not be avoided due to globalization.

Let’s take the concepts of traditions and modernity with respect to the role of women in the society. The western traditional woman is
one who lives according to a specific division of labour (Cooking, cleaning, housekeeping, child rearing) and relationship dynamics (subordinate to the leadership of the male) that has been deeply entrenched in their society since the ages. Thus western women when denied of equal rights, organized themselves and fought for their rights. As a result, Feminism evolved as a socio-cultural movement to secure a complete equality of women with men in enjoyment of all rights - moral, religious, social, political, education, legal, economic and sexual and so on. After the successful execution of this movement, there came a sea change in the status of women and they started calling them “modern”. In this way the term 'modern woman' can be loosely defined as any woman who is educated, has her own hobbies and interests, and who shapes her relationships according to her and her partner's personal criteria (as opposed to by a pre-existing social system).

However, Indian tradition over the centuries has regarded women as preserver of the family. She makes all kinds of sacrifices for the welfare of the family and enjoys equal status to men. But during medieval period, affected by foreign attacks the condition of women got a tremendous change which indirectly affected Indian tradition too. In Indian society the roles of men and women were redefined. The husband-father was the head of the family who go out of the house to deal with the world of business and work and earn money; but the wife-mother was the in-charge of the house and family, stayed close to
home rearing children and doing all household works. As a result, polarization of sex became dominant in the society.

Influenced by the feminists of the West and with the advancement of education and awareness among the women, many Indian feminist writers started writing against the secondary position of women. Some of them are Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukarjee, and so on. They presented ‘modern women’ who started working shoulder to shoulder with men, and this traditional formula got a tremendous change which is being adopted by women all over India. To them, modernism tends to discard the notion that women are physically or intellectually, socially or economically or biologically inferior to men.

These women novelists protest against the traditional woman who is submissive and waits hand and foot on man, expects nothing in return and doesn’t mind not being allowed to have a mind or life of her own. They always try to keep their husbands sexually satisfied and are more family oriented. Even if they themselves are unsatisfied, they never supposed to raise their voice against it as it is bound to be under valued morals. In contrast, they portray ‘modern woman’ who is economically independent and shares family budget. Even she is sexually independent to choose her partner who can provide her both physical and spiritual satisfaction through his love and caring. A woman too focused on her career and knows about her rights more than before.
Traditionally, a woman in Indian society marries not just the man but also his family and subsequently loses her identity in marriage, relinquishes her freedom and sets about pleasing everybody. Thus, ‘Quest for identity’ is the most haunting theme of their novels. These feminists give importance to spiritual rather than material values in life. That’s why women here don’t want to compete with men rather they want to extract as much convenience and individual freedom from their male partners as would satisfy them to keep on marital status successfully. Probably have sex if it’s in a committed relationship only. The western women are more conscious of their demands than their obligations. It is only through a conscious effort and sufficient education and exposure to western feminist ideologies that Indian women are getting used to the concept of liberation or personal freedom. But it is difficult for the Indian women to overcome their cultural conditioning all of a sudden in this respect.

But when we come to the present time, which can be called as post-modern era, we find a new generation of women mostly western educated and economically independent. This ‘new woman’ wants to project herself as an Individual, free from all kinds of familial relations and social responsibilities. She seeks to overthrow matrimonial bondage and adopts new and different perspectives revolting against the old order. She rebels against all odds coming in her way in fulfilling her unlimited aspirations. She rebels against the existing moral codes and social norms. Her rebellious craving for individuality results in disintegration of marriage and family.
Women characters of Nomita Gokhale and Shobha De belong to this category. Shattering the traditional image of the Indian woman, as weak, docile person living at the mercy of her partner and following the western tradition, these two gossip writers present this ‘liberated women’ very freely and boldly. It will not be wrong to say that Priya Sharma in ‘Paro: Dreams of Passion’ is the mirror image of Karuna in ‘Socialite Evenings’. Their novels show a stark contrast between tradition and modernity. They are a new breed of women who live on their own terms. Both the women use the same technique of manipulating opposite sex to achieve their ends. Since they lack commitment to any ideal or vision, portray only a small section of Indian society i.e. highly urbanized and affluent metropolitan society, that is why their women characters can be called-“Abberations”

Shobha De’s women are liberated individuals who do not hesitate to challenge socially approved male hegemony on the basic issues of life. She reshapes her women characters as aggressive blasters of the male ego and male hierarchy. She compares the traditional women with doormats and supports modernism, as she observes, "The women in my books are definitely not doormats, they are not willing to be kicked around". Shobha De in her novels presents man-woman relationship as power-play in which both involve like cat and mouse game. It is evident when she says –

"The quarrel is not who will scrabble to the top of the human heap and stay there but with the race being run in fair terms and without
weighted handicaps. Men will have to come to terms with women power. This isn’t the voice of naïve female optimism. It is the voice of reason and logic. I simply believe that another alternative just does not exist any longer”.

In the name of raising a protest against the male dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom to act according to their will Shobha De wants a social acceptance for the naked show of vulgarity which is highly condemnable. She projects the image of this new woman with negative and unsocial sides of her personality. On one hand she gives a social message of using sexuality as a tool to cherish their own dreams, on the other she says,

“ I did write with a great deal of empathy towards women without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the women’s situation.”

One should ask Shobha De what kind of empathy she is talking about. Empathy with a woman who on the very second day of her mother’s death, craves for a hectic session of orgy with her lover when the mourners in the adjoining room are expressing their condolences (Sisters 154) or an insane mother initiating her daughters to pornography (Starry Nights 28). Her novels are intriguing and blatantly present truthful images of the upcoming new woman with an amazing potential to flirt and fall in illicit relationship with men as well as other women in the society. This new woman is an aberration from the usual representation of women characters by other women novelists
in India. However, the role of women in society has been changing with each decade of a century always with a good deal of social conflict and ideological struggle, but it does not mean describing characters as only love-slaves or bitches or mere helpmates who can only betray the cause of women and in turn demolishing the socio-cultural set up of the country like India.

Indian woman, in earlier works of feminism is restricted to or subject to compatibility with Indian traditional values. This woman wants the recognition of her Individuality as a socially vibrant unit for whom family and society are the essential part of life. Individual freedom for her is not the name of escaping from one’s responsibilities and social obligations. She is well aware of her social status and family surroundings and her individuality goes hand in hand with her image as a social being. She fears social sanctions and tries to fulfill her desires by maintaining social respectability. She is a free self with her own emotions and but aligns with the values and traditions set up by the society. Many Indian novelists have created varied, colourful, intense and wonderfully interesting image of Indian women in their novels. They have painted the different issues of the Indian woman from the traditional and modern viewpoints depicting all her desires and anxieties, happiness and sorrow, success and failures. They focused the woman's inner world and her position in society. But in comparison Shobha De says, “Never allow society to define your self image.”

Modernity should have its roots in adopting new and logical; and discarding meaningless and harmful practices or customs. It should aim in removing what is unwanted and retaining what is good in any tradition. In this way modernism is not to do away with traditions but to modify it according to the changing times and people. For example Indian society faced a lot of ill practices like Dowry, Sati, Child Marriage, Prostitution, Sexual exploitation, Rape etc. The practice of Sati being the most illogical that when the husband dies, the wife follows him to the funeral pyre. Even if the wife is very young, her wish to live is strangled and goes unheeded. This cruel custom was a part of Indian tradition during ancient times. However, such practice was not followed by men. A man could remarry even on the second day of his wife's demise. Other ill practices like dowry and Child marriage turned the situation into more devilish state. Many girls committed suicide to overcome their situations. To be born as girl in the society was like curse. The birth of a daughter was shunned and considered as foreshadowing a chain of troubles for the parents. As such girls were married off early before they reached the age of puberty and nobody was bothered about their education.

However, this traditional pattern has undergone a lot of change in present times due to the efforts of many reformists like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekanand etc. As literature reflects the society, its accepted patterns of thoughts, feelings and actions, this regeneration of feminism can be seen clearly in the works of many women writers of
this era. They write with lot more enthusiasm and supported the cause of women's liberation. Thus the purpose of feminist writing in India is to provide solutions to the problems of women and bring a positive change in the society.

But Shobha De’s women do not show any positivity and are incapable to set an example for the betterment of the society. Shobha De's women are essentially represented as sexually liberated and free thinking selves who are very calculative in nature. Shobha De's female characters in order to prove their individuality break every moral code and shun off familial responsibilities. They are highly selfish and too self absorbed that they do not believe in any human relation and crave for loneliness. The present chapter is an analysis of her female characters in two of her novels – Karuna in Socialite Evenings and Maya in Second Thoughts, with their outlook as traditional or modern.

Throughout the novel Socialite Evenings, the protagonist Karuna is a woman who declines to follow the traditional path of etiquettes and manners. Karuna belongs to a strictly traditional middle class home, born in Satara, a remote village in Maharashtra. Brought up in a traditional atmosphere in which the head of the family – father is strict and disciplined, she develops a hatred towards father for keeping mother and children at a secondary place. As Karuna notices – "Mother was preoccupied with what to cook for Father's dinner. It never mattered what the children’s preferences were ...... Mother gave father priority, whether it was at mealtimes or anytime else"
Karuna is a problem child both at home and at school. She refuses to cower before elders and at school. She wears her sash hipster style from childhood days. She is not much interested in serious studies but in reading novels. In college, she meets Anjali and Charlie and they both inspire Karuna to try in the field of modelling. Taking modeling as a profession is something highly objectionable to a middle class family especially to her father. When Karuna gets her first modelling assignment for a newspaper, her father rages high on discovering the secret and gives her a tight slap –

"I felt Father’s palm hitting me sharply across the face. ‘Disgraceful! Cheap! Filthy! No Brahmin girl has ever stooped so low. Tell me - how did this photograph get here? I stood there glumly too sullen and shocked to say anything. I could feel the sting of his fingers on my cheek’ (SE 26)

But Karuna continues her modelling career under her mentor Anjali, a middle aged sophisticate who is the portal to the big world of fashion designing and advertising. Karuna migrates from Satara to Bombay and starts appreciating the change that she notices in this big city –

"The scene was changing even in Bombay. Women worked, women married, women divorced and women remained single". (SE 44)

Anjali, her friend who introduces her to modeling and the sophisticated world, makes her to take decisions on her own, free from all influences. She advises Karuna,
"Luxury, is like a narcotic - you can’t get enough of it. Today it’s an air conditioned bathroom, tomorrow it’s a jacuzzi. You have tasted the forbidden fruit and liked it. How can you now go back to eating raw vegetables?" (SE 38)

To bring her career to success, Karuna uses her sexuality as a powerful tool/ladder to reach the top. Even her friend Anjali accuses her 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 US gives her a feeling of superiority and makes her assertive. Karuna, with all her attempts at ego assertion, refuses subscription to stereotypes, to surrender to the societal norms of morality. She wants everything in life as she plays different roles at different times to quench her emotional and psychic thirst. She is a model, a housewife, a society lady and an actor-writer and a paramour.

In our Indian tradition, **Marriage** is considered as the fundamental social unit for a family which rests on the principles of stability, togetherness and mutual care. Commenting upon the benefits resulting from family, Alexander Walker observes:

"The advantages resulting from the states of marriage are that two sexes may reciprocally satisfy natural desires which are felt equally by each . . . that they equally submit the exercise of the reproductive organs to a healthful regularity; that they may equally perpetuate their common species; that they may equally by respective duties, provide for
children proceeding from their mutual union, that they may equally assist each other throughout life by reciprocal affection and cares; that they may in old age receive the cares of their common progeny; and that they may, in health and well-being, reach that age which all these circumstances generally enable married pairs to attain."

The novel 'Socialite Evenings gives us the picture of ultra modern Indian women. It mirrors at the fact that the institutions of family and marriage come under tremendous strain in the modern times. Karuna has independent thoughts and she feels that marriage subjugates and enslaves women. She is unlike other married women who have practically no choice left to them except surrendering to what their husband will or desires. But Karuna has her own say and is free to choose her ways and means. The husband does not have any super imposition on her thoughts. To describe the upper class women she says –

"In their circle, nearly everyone was thrice married and divorcée was commonplace". (SE 53)

Karuna’s marriage is a failure as she comes to realize that she has-

"Married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time. My husband was not a villain. He was just an average Indian husband - unexciting, uninspiring, untutored. Why he did marry me, I shall never know". (SE 94)
It appears that Karuna has just a formal relationship with her husband devoid of any intimacy and emotional satisfaction. For Karuna it's nothing more than a compromise with herself as she realizes – "Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It's just something to get used to" (SE 98).

She sums up the average Indian women's marital life as "an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left". To whom Marriage is like "a skin allergy, an irritant all right". (99) Karuna finds her marriage loveless, joyless and bridgeless. There is no understanding between the husband and wife.

Karuna is a life of instincts and urges. She feels herself locked in a fragile and futile marital knot where she finds the husband and wife as the inhabitants of two different planets. She gets utterly bored by the husband's compulsive socializing, his horrible safari and the gum he constantly chews. Their husband-wife relationship is so formal and lacking intimacy that Karuna calls her husband as 'Black Label'.

With crumbing of moral and ethical values this modern woman, Karuna indulges in an extra-marital affair to seek shelter in different identities for momentary solace. Karuna's frequent bickering with her husband led to her becoming involved with theatre, and Krish, "a hot blooded Bengali rebel from the late 60's, he had flirted with all the right things - poetry, theatre and politics". (SE 162)
Krish and Karuna soon fall into a promiscuous affair which continued for three years. But when Karuna comes to know that Krish is a married man, she starts pitying herself,

"I felt tense and hostile. All of me was knotted up. May be I was heading for a breakdown. My husband knew nothing. Sensed nothing. He seemed terribly preoccupied and I assumed it was complicated business deal. For the first time in my life, I felt like dying. I felt sick of myself and full of self pity. I hadn't told anybody about Krish and me. It was a secret I felt extremely possessive about". (271)

Karuna is not guilty conscious for having an affair but becomes possessive about Krish, a married man. Provoked by her friend Anjali she continues her illegal relationship with Krish. Anjali says to Karuna,

"I know your marriage isn't fantastic but it isn't a total write off either. If you can have both - a boring husband in the home and an exciting lover on the sidelines - perfect". (SE 273)

She even plans to go to Venice on a holiday with Krish to satisfy her insatiate desire. She feels on the top of the world and dreams to fulfill her lust without bothering herself about traditions and morals. She proudly asserts this as –

"when the husband saw me off at the airport, I didn't feel even a tinge of guilt, remorse or shame. I waved to him cheerfully, even gave him a warm good bye kiss at home with long embrace . ... It wasn't cruelty, it was indifference. At that moment, the one thing that mattered was
"being with Krish - every thing else was irrelevant secondary, practically non existent." (SE 283)

After this Karuna proudly reveals her affair with Krish to her husband and makes an ingenuous declaration about her illicit relationship with Krish-

“I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him in Venice. There is a good chance that I will feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. May be he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant me, In which case it will really be A Death in Venice. You know by now that I’m not the flighty sort. I don’t flirt at random like my other friends….Treat this as a short-term mania that will wear itself out.” (SE 186)

The discovery that Karuna is ‘pregnant’ makes her quite nervous and panic. Her initial reaction is-

“What am I supposed to do now? I don’t want the bloody baby. I’ve never wanted one-Krish’s or anyone else. I don’t know what women are supposed to do when they find themselves knocked up. Should I get myself into a clinic? Which doctor?” (SE 213)

Furiously, Karuna seeks abortion and learns that she cannot conceive anymore. When her husband doubts about the paternity of the child, she divorces her husband and blames him for having no emotional bond between them. She confesses that,

"I think our marriage was over the day our awful honeymoon started. We’ve got nothing going. I don’t love you - never have …. I am tired of
your smugness, your irritated mannerisms, and the way you take me for granted and expect me to fall into your overall scheme of things". (SE 293)

Her divorce makes her more rebellious. She comes to a decision about breaking the relationship with Krish because marrying him is going back to inadequate middle class life again that she hates. She takes journalism as career. She goes through all kinds of physical and mental turmoils which make her feel depressed and dejected. For the first time she feels the need of money and home. Karuna starts acting in ad films and soon gets a role in Hindi version of 'Desire under the Elms'. Once the money starts flowing she finds out exclusive freedom to do what she likes. Then she meets Girish Shridhar - a great art film maker and a loner and widower with a young son Kunal. Karuna sticks a friendship with Girish and he in turn offers her key role in his forthcoming major production 'Shakuntala' which brings her fame and defame both. In the gossip columns of a magazine 'Hits and Flops', run by the powerful hotshot editor Varun, she finds that she is in the rumour of having an affair with both father Girish and his young son Kunal.

But Karuna does not take it seriously and even refuses the marriage proposal from Girish. She realizes that she cannot be happy with Girish inspite of their common interests. Her mother also suggests her to settle down in life with a man for security and protection in future. Her mother advises – “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. Society can be very cruel. Today you are still young to get a good husband”. (SE 440) Even after this Karuna is not ready to sacrifice her independent, peaceful single life to marriage which requires lot of sacrifices. Being driven by the false ‘quest for identity and existence’, she refuses to accept her mother’s advice –

"But mother, why does security rest with a man? I feel confident now that I can look after myself. I am earning as much as any man. I have a roof over my head. I don’t really have any responsibilities. I am at peace with myself. I’m not answerable to anyone. I don’t feel like complicating my life by getting into a second marriage”. (SE 442)

Karuna is such an independent modern woman who does not seek any male company to live a comfortable life. She decides not to make her life miserable for the sake of society and takes firm decision. That’s why she rejects downright her husband’s proposal to come back to him. Her preference is her career and income than any thing else. Even though she is not precisely gifted or trained for any profession, she struggles to get recognition in advertising and television productions. Her career starts flourishing and she becomes self dependent. She starts making ad films and writing memoirs. Meanwhile she strikes up an affair with Ranbir Roy, a reporter from the "Washington Times”. Karuna defies and refuses a relationship with him as she knows Ranbir is a married man with two kids. She
uses Ranbir for lifting herself professionally without indulging in any intimate relationship with him. For Karuna –

"Ranbir was relaxing and fun but that was it. It was good to have him around because unlike the locals, he knew where he stood. He didn’t misread signals and most importantly, he didn’t behave like a horny teenager in heat. We kidded around a great deal, but we also knew the score. The undercurrents of a possible affair were always present, but they did not preoccupy us nor did they cut into the friendship". (SE 487-88)

On Ranbir’s suggestion to use her own life story for a documentary on the Indian women, Karuna gets an idea of writing her autobiography.

Thus, Shobha De successfully discovers a new class of women who have started flourishing among the rich and mighty social strata. Karuna is the modern new woman independent in every way. Her defiant attitudes in dress and manners and her practice “it is OK to drop the mask in the evening and take a chance.” (SE 488) confuse the readers about the role of so-called modern woman in the Indian society. This modern woman is only concerned to ‘I am a good thing’ where ‘I’ does not stand for any commitment to spiritual and moral values. Such a woman is, as Ranbir Roy remarks- disgustedly self assured and revoltingly self sufficient”. (SE 490)

While portraying Karuna, Shobha De is towards the non-conformist feminists who defy traditions and opt for modernity. In
Karuna’s character, she puts an image of new woman who doesn’t believe in abiding to traditional values at the cost of individual happiness. She rebels against the existing moral codes and social norms which tends to relegate the woman to a secondary place in the society. Her rebellious craving for individuality and happiness results in break up of family and relationships Karuna is so self-confident that her single status can make her life more enterprising and much happier. It looks as if she puts marital relationship in cold stores making the male partner an unnecessary encumbrance.

Shobha De makes an attempt to focus on an alternative woman-created culture in which she shatters traditional role given to women and inaugurates individual rebellion against patriarchy. Shobha De focuses on ultra modern women in the characters of Anjali and Ritu who lead reckless wild life in search of freedom - a freedom which is not bound by any rule. They feel no scruples in fixing up extra marital connections and flirt even when they are in a committed relationship.

All the women in the novel are attractive, self-assured, conscious of their plus points and clever enough to hide their drawbacks. They are happy with lot of wealth by which they can buy the new-found freedom and all the pleasures in life. Anjali marries Abe (Abbas Tyabji) for he is rich and able to give her luxury that she had dreamt of. Anjali knew beforehand that Abe had a wild reputation with women. Anjali is unhindered at this as to her Abe is the golden
egg laying goose; she even procures young virgins for Abe's sexual satisfaction. Anjali also has her own set of lovers. Like her husband she is equally reckless in her sexual behaviour. After years of experience of such kind she tells Karuna –

"Man just feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient women. They prefer girls like me - dependent dolls. We make them feel like heroes and saviours. You should try it - see how much more you'll be able to get out of him that way". (SE 101)

Anjali develops illicit relationship even with a very young boy who - age wise, could well be her son but the affair ends in a disaster. She picks up another affair with a Frenchman which too ends disastrously with her divorce. Later, she marries Kumar, a gay who has plenty of money. Thus, life to Anjali means only men and money.

Another character is Ritu, who is quite good at the art of flirting. She comes back from Switzerland with her married sister. Karuna, the protagonist, feels her advises to be good enough when she is passing through a tough time with her husband. She feels comfort in her rubbish talks about men and indigenous unfair relationships. Karuna admits it as –

"Ritu began dominating my life and not because of our talks alone. I was fascinated by her way with men. Whatever it was she had, she attracted all sorts, from little servant boys she mothered to silver haired industrialists, who drooled at her feet and begged for a smile". (SE 103)
She gives a lesson to Karuna about men and advises her to have illicit relationship. She says, "Men, like dogs, could be conditioned through reward and punishment". (SE131)

She also gives Karuna important tips to maintain secrecy in her extramarital relationship. She says to Karuna - "no calls on Sundays, no calls at home, letters to be destroyed immediately after reading .... no presents". (SE 270)

Shobha De deals with similar theme in her another novel 'Second thoughts' in which Maya, the protagonist, dwindles between tradition and modernity. Maya, a young and ambitious Calcutta girl, marries a rich Bombay-based, foreign returned businessman Ranjan. Marriage for Maya is a fascination and love with Bombay than taking responsibilities of life. Maya is one of those young girls for whom marriage ushers glamour, fascination and freedom, but once the ceremony is over, their dreams come crashing down. Maya finds her relationship with her husband dry and mechanical and her excitement at the prospect of settling in Bombay- the city of dreams is lost. Maya faces the harsher realities of life with a lot of bitterness and feels herself deceived. After her marriage she is eager to catch the life-style of Mumbai but her husband turns out to be a traditional Indian male.

Ranjan is an obedient ‘Mama’s boy’ and does everything with his mother’s permission. Maya finds her role as a typical housewife very boring. Her husband, despite his high social position, is a typical Indian male who does not like woman to work outside the home.
Before marriage when Ranjan meets Maya, he makes his views clear about 'Career' of woman. He says –

“Career… True, that is the modern trend. But in my case, I am earning well enough to support a wife and family. I believe it is a woman's duty to run a good home”

Maya, being a career minded woman, finds her marriage contrary to what she expected. She realizes her mistake in choosing Ranjan who is a stereotyped traditional husband in the disguise of modern looking educated person. When Maya asks Ranjan about finding a job, he underestimates his wife in the following manner -

"I asked, 'Do I have to work? I mean, do I have to do housework? I could always find a job. I do have a degree in textile designing, after all'. Ranjan snorted dismissively, 'A job? In Bombay? Maya you don't know what you're talking about. Bombay is not Calcutta, where just about anybody can walk into an office and get a job. Bombay is like New York or London. Tough. Competitive. You have to be good …… great …… brilliant …. to get a job here. People don’t waste time on nobodies.” (ST 39)

Maya feels a lot of desperation and disappointment when she finds her marriage full of boredom and her dreams unfulfilled. As she expresses her wish,

"I wanted the city to seep into me slowly, I wanted to absorb it, digest it, make it a part of my system, I wanted desperately to become a Bombaywali. I wanted to belong’ (ST 27)
But Maya finds Ranjan opposite to her desires. He taunts her when Maya once asks him to take her out at least during the weekend:

"Sometimes you talk like such a kid. Life isn't a picnic, you know. And you are not in Bombay on a holiday. As a married woman, you have to learn to deal with responsibilities". (ST 27)

Maya’s frustration and rebellious nature cannot allow her to take her husband’s indifference lying down. Maya has all the material comfort of receiving her husband’s love. She is mortified by Ranjan’s mother obsession. She even suffers an unfulfilled sexual relationship with Ranjan. He turns out to be a cold sexual partner to Maya. His indifferent attitude shocks Maya during four day clumsy honeymoon at a depressing hotel in Mahabaleshwar, a hill resort near Bombay. Strangely enough, she comes to know from him on enquiry that he shared bed with other women, ‘he tried, but it didn’t work’. At this stage Maya is in a love-making mood but Ranjan asks her to wait and says,

"I am not ready yet Maya . . . you will have to be patient. It is going to take time, I can’t, I just can’t" (ST 55)

On another occasion, when Maya takes the initiation, he recoils and jumps back from bed as though he had received electric shock. Maya describes his condition as –

"He keeps trembling in bed for a long time breathing heavily and asks her to stop behaving like a cheap woman. A Prostitute". (259)
Thus, Maya finds her husband Ranjan unable to satisfy her sexually and feels dejected.

Maya decides to seek the fulfillment of her dreams elsewhere. At this time, she gets infatuated to Nikhil, a college boy in her neighbourhood, who is 'good looking, confident, sporty, cocky, flirtatious, lazy, spoilt and quite irresistible'. In front of Nikhil's charming personality Maya feels herself helpless and circumstances too compel her to take interest in him. She needs physical fulfillment which she finds in Nikhil whose flirtations give Maya the necessary kick of companionship. She indulges in a strange relationship with Nikhil and has her sexual gratification in one encounter with Nikhil which gives her satisfaction and rejuvenation beyond measure.

Maya's ability to satisfy her urges in these meetings with Nikhil places her among those women of Shobha De who are able to break the shackles of social morality even if the experience of freedom is of a short duration. This affair becomes Maya's most precious enjoyment. She cleverly hides her affair from her workaholic husband. Maya gets boosting up from Nikhil to come out of her monotonous life, gives her a great relief and ultimately the physical satisfaction she was longing for. At one occasion Nikhil phones Maya and extends his help in household works.

"Noting her nervous state, Nikhil said, 'There is no point in suffering silently, you should come off it. Act real. Get real".
Maya secretly enjoyed with Nikhil that forbidden fruit of promiscuity. She has got what she missed in her relationship with her husband i.e. both companionship and sex but such a fulfillment was only temporary and short-lived. When Nikhil gets engaged with another girl she finds herself in a terrible situation. At the culmination of her extra-marital relationship she feels shocked and stunned and again finds herself trapped in an abject situation. Her life like a circle comes to the same point from where she has started her journey.

Not only Maya, the other two women characters her mother Chitra and her mother-in-law Mrs. Mallik are also typical conservative, stereotyped traditional Indian women. As her mother-in-law is of the opinion, "In any Indian family, the husband’s comforts always come first, everything else follows". (11) Mrs. Mallik, Maya’s mother-in-law is an influential lady and has a very clear picture of her future daughter in law. She comments,

"If you ask me, it's always wiser to get a girl from socially inferior background . . . . A wealthier wife spells doom. The husband loses all control over her and she ends up having the upper hand. Such a marriage can never work which is why we were so careful while selecting the right candidate for Ranjan”. (15)

Chitra, Maya’s mother has traditional outlook just like any girls mother in Indian middle class family. She is acutely worried about Maya’s dark complexion which could be a hindrance in her marriage to a foreign returned boy. She readily accepts all the terms and
conditions of Mrs. Mallik to get her daughter married soon. When Mrs. Mallik lays down the rules and explains to her that girls can only be moulded if they stop thinking of their parents home as their own, Chitra agrees quickly without any qualms.

"I believe in the same thing myself. A girl has to cut the cord of her family quickly and identify with her in-laws. The sooner she does this, the better". (13)

Both Maya and Ranjan are strongly influenced by the traditional orthodoxy of their respective parents. They are the realistic representation of traditional Indian men and women. Although, they are born and brought up in modern urban surroundings but deep down they still cherish the age old norms and traditions. Their marriage is full of disappointment which does not provide them physical as well as spiritual satisfaction.

The women in Shobha De's novels break the general social rules and traditional set up. Thus, Shobha De's woman protagonists-Karuna in Socialite Evenings and Maya in Second Thoughts defy tradition in order to fulfill their desires and dreams. They come out from similar circumstances of life and their attitudes are quite similar in nature, even their culminating end is quite similar to each other. Both of them have an urge and power to shake off and defy male supremacy in all spheres of life. Both want to be rich, economically independent and are highly individualistic. Both indulge in extramarital affairs as they feel their husbands are cold, conservative
dull male like any other stereotyped Indian male. They look for men, who can fulfill their desires and satisfy their physical and material needs.

Shobha De, in her novels redefines marriage. Women like Karuna, Anjali, and Maya marry not out of choice or any conviction but they need a husband to afford their luxuries of life. For Karuna, husband is a ‘Package deal containing an assured income and all the luxuries’; for Anjali –her second marriage with a homosexual is nothing but

‘an exchange for the Porche, emeralds, holidays in Biarritz, shopping along the Champs-Elysees, a villa in Ooty, parties every night, unlimited Champagne...’; for Maya ‘Marrying Ranjan was like marrying Bombay..... she would be bonded with Bombay forever.’

Both the novels end ironically as Karuna and Maya meets disastrous end and live the life in futility. Karuna ends up a loner who finds her evenings lonely in spite of her active participation in ‘Socialite evenings’ and Maya feels self-deceived. Thus, both the novels put forth the image of such modern women who do not believe in the dumb acceptance of situations of life rather they rebel to any extent to fulfill their dreams.

In these novels Shobha De mirrors the changing roles of women in the upper class metropolitan society are somewhat away from ground reality. Shobha De herself married twice but condemns marriage in her novels which is something unjustified. Does she
practice open sex or extra-marital sex herself that she dare projects women in such crude sexual behaviour. Thus, this condemnation of marriage or portrayal of extramarital affairs is only the ways to gain cheap popularity. Her novels can be the bestsellers but neither they are ideological marvel nor are they upholding feminism. Such literary works are the free show of voyeurism and immorality.
References:


3. Shobha De, Shooting from the Hip, p.113.


All subsequent references to this edition will be referred to as SE.


All subsequent references to this edition will be referred to as ST.