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**Khirod Borah**  
PhD Research Scholar,  
Department of English,  
Arunachal University of  
Studies, Arunachal Pradesh,  
India

**Dr. Prasenjit Datta Roy**  
Research Associate Professor,  
Department of English,  
Arunachal University of  
Studies, Namsai, Arunachal  
Pradesh, India

## Marital Relation In Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings*

**Khirod Borah and Prasenjit Datta Roy**

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### Abstract

This article takes a close look at how Shobha De depicts marital relationships in her novel "*Socialite Evenings*," analyzing how the author questions traditional gender roles, explores emotional disappointment, and shows how elite Indian society views marriage as a commodity. De reveals the emotional vacuum and transactional relationships common in affluent marriages through the protagonist Karuna's transformation from a passive spouse to a proactive person. By depicting marriage as an institution characterized by performance, suppression, and manipulation rather than as a place of intimacy, the story depicts the social and psychological ramifications of patriarchal expectations. Through the feminist viewpoint, this study examines how De questions the idealization and purity of marriage, highlighting themes of autonomy, betrayal, and identity conflict. In addition to dismantling the illusion of marital bliss, the article contends that "*Socialite Evenings*" gives a voice to the subdued resistance of women who are negotiating their agency under repressive relational structures. This adds to the larger conversation in contemporary Indian English literature about gender, sexuality, and domestic entrapment.

**Keywords:** Shobha de, marriage, marital relationship, "socialite evenings," gender

### Introduction

"*Marriages are made in Heaven and consummated on Earth*," the adage says. An institution of society, it is undeniably the bedrock upon which social construction rests. The bride and groom are believed to be eternally united in Indian culture during this special day. Walking hand in hand through life's journey is a sacred promise. In marriage, the couple's bodies and souls become one. In harmony, they experience joys and sorrows, pleasures and pains. It is the holy thread that unites two distinct things. By receiving the approval of their elders and the affection and well-wishes of their kin, they are acknowledged by society.

Until death breaks the bond, they assume that their love, romance, trust, and companionship will last forever. Trust, fidelity, and mutual understanding form the bedrock of this most intimate and everlasting relationship. A prosperous, joyful, peaceful, and eternal marriage is the perfect ending to the human experience. To rephrase, we might think of marriage as a contract. The purpose of it is to satisfy the sexual and physiological requirements of the bride and groom. The point is to have sexual satisfaction and have offspring, which means to create new life. Married couples contribute many positive traits to a family: unity, trust, understanding, interdependence, reliability, care, and generosity.

Marriage is built on the bedrock of trust, love, cooperation, honesty, and faithful companionship, which are essential for its success. Marriage, in a nutshell, is a social institution that is vital to human flourishing. The couple and their family enjoy a state of perfect harmony and heavenly delight when they are married. But marriage has become dubious because of technology and people's yearning for relatively insignificant, fleeting, and enjoyable things. This fearful relationship is extremely vulnerable and in danger due to their fixation on bodily desires. People who are prosperous, independent, and affluent have put this relationship in a precarious situation.

Among the least sacred are marriages between members of the urban elite who are drawn to Western culture. Its sacredness has been eroding over time. Partners no longer feel a natural affinity for one another and fall head over heels for one another. They are untrustworthy and unreliable. Their once strong marriage tie is now very weak, fake, and hollow. The breakdown of their family unit was a direct outcome of their relationship's lack of purity and devotion.

Shobha De is well-known for her portrayal of urban socialites; she is a notable and

**Correspondence Author;**  
**Khirod Borah**  
PhD Research Scholar,  
Department of English,  
Arunachal University of  
Studies, Arunachal Pradesh,  
India

extensively read feminist writer and columnist. Without holding back, she paints a picture of the society in all its naked honesty. She never misses an opportunity to wow her readers with a stunning description of a nude or intimate moment. She wrote courageously in favor of female characters out of a profound desire to see women's standing, liberty, and empowerment enhanced and empowered.

By extension, she backs up their demands for equality and the assertions they made. Her first work, which describes the marital connection of the urban elite class, is a dazzling illustration of feminism and "*Socialite Evenings*" in other novels. In this work, sexual liberation is explored without compromising marital fidelity, leading to a reimagining of marriage.

Many of Shobha De's novels center on marital or premarital relationships. A woman's social standing is not determined by her achievements in the workplace or the classroom, but rather by the quality of her marriage. Meeting one another and embarking on a marital adventure is an inevitable part of life. Women in traditional patriarchal Indian families are often repressed and expected to conform to rigid gender norms and societal expectations, but this does not stop them from pursuing their dreams.

Our society's men assert their dominating authority and privilege as superior to those of the opposite sex. Shobha De has sincerely tried to elevate women's position through her writings, challenging all of these established social standards in the process. In De's works, the female protagonists are strong-willed, free-thinking, and liberal. The stereotypical patriarchal constraints and women's marginalization are something she strives to turn around. They don't always bend over backwards to please their coworkers.

In her 1989 debut novel, *Evening*, Shobha De depicts affluent metropolitan women whose marriages are monotonous and cruel, devoid of compassion and peace. Marital joy and harmony have been denied to the female characters. At social gatherings, they were shown as both showpieces and companions. Honour and respect were never bestowed upon the women. There is a severe lack of affection and connection.

The novel's protagonist, Karuna, chooses adulterous affairs after her marriage falls out of harmony. She was enchanted by the world of glitz and glamour because she was a middle-class woman from Mumbai, the Bollywood capital. Her marriage was not a mutually beneficial partnership. Her husband lacked regard for her and was rude and uncaring. He seemed completely unconcerned. He treated her with nonchalance. They were not seen to be deeply involved with one another. Nobody cares about each other, and there's a severe lack of affection and compassion. Without zeal and excitement, marital life was unresponsive.

Nonetheless, they shared a home and breathed the same air, so their careless behavior was minimal. It lacked enthusiasm and friendliness.

*"My marriage went sour because I'd married the wrong man for the wrong reason at the wrong time," she says, "honestly apologizing for her actions. My spouse was not a bad guy. He was just your typical Indian husband—unremarkable, unmotivated, and untaught. I can never understand why he chose to marry me. No matter how many times I inquired, he would simply shrug it off. Neither self-reflection nor causing a stir were traits he exhibited"* (De 39).

They were both unimportant and unimportant to the other. Karuna was unable to get aroused by her husband's lack of excitement, enthusiasm, and vitality. There was no optimism or hope in their relationship. Karuna was unmoved by her husband's deliberate lack of engagement in their marital journey, and he did not attempt to reawaken her spirits.

Karuna is miserable in her marriage and has mental instability following her divorce. Being alone is too much for her. After going through such a difficult marriage, she yearned to rediscover who she was. Her dream of becoming rich and secure after her marriage did not come true. She aspired to amass an immense fortune and live a lavish lifestyle.

However, the spark and warmth that come from emotional attachment were missing. The level of discontent in the air makes it impossible for a married couple like Karuna and her husband to have a happy marriage. A problematic and unpleasant scenario arose in the relationship as a result of the unsuitable surroundings. Karuna eventually distanced herself from her spouse as a result of this. She felt a great deal of insecurity regarding her independence, prestige, and freedom. She had no social standing. There was no place for her in her husband's household. It had a profound effect on Karuna's mental health.

Deep wounds were inflicted upon her soul. Her marriage ultimately turned out to be pointless and fruitless. Cooperation, understanding, loyalty, and trust amongst the parties were nonexistent. A shallow and fake closeness coexisted with a genuine affection and tenderness that was plain to see. Therefore, Khish had no trouble attracting her. He piqued her curiosity, and she fell head over heels for him. At last, their bond was solidified.

Karuna's husband found out about her romance with Krish after a while. Out of his rage, he accused her of being selfish, unfaithful, and treacherous. *"The day our honeymoon began, I believe our marriage ended,"* she said. *"Right now, we're not doing anything. You have never loved me"* (De 21).

Even with Krish, Karuna is not happy and fulfilled, according to De's portrayal. She found Krish to be completely commonplace, opportunistic, and superficial. It was not because her husband was violent or inebriated that Karuna decided to end her marriage. Just plain old boredom was to blame. No passionate closeness, no private, emotionally charged communication, and no intimacy. She couldn't fathom a purpose for a life spent in monotony. She was unresponsive whenever her spouse tried to make love to her. She couldn't stop planning out the day's events, even as they slept. She describes her mental and character decline as a result of an unseen inner struggle and anguish.

Anjali wed another character who was a seasoned adulterer with a history of having several affairs. She went on the prowl for a wealthy individual after her separation from Abe. At last, she narrowed her focus to Kumar. Her excitement was shattered when she learned that Kumar was gay. With Murthy and other youngsters, he engaged in homosexual relations. This time, she was so relieved to have Kumar's financial support that she became a devout follower of her faith.

A woman who is unhappy in her marriage is portrayed by Ritu in "*Socialite Evenings*." She moves out on her own after getting a divorce and continues to work as a doctor. By claiming her husband lacks sexual drive, she exposes him as

an adulterous spouse. This led to a brief period of closeness and romance for her. With Gul, she pushes herself to her boundaries. Ritu and her husband's relationship was entirely platonic. They both turned on each other while pretending to be ignorant. Therefore, Ritu went back to her husband, and he took her back despite knowing about Gul's abortion.

But Shobha De, via Karuna's parents, highlighted the power of traditional Hindu marriage among all these disorganised marital relations. They proved that the term "marriage" meant what it said it meant. They have remained steadfastly connected, sharing in one another's joys and sorrows, and offering unwavering emotional support. They were devoted to one another. Their mental unity in that scenario was built upon the foundation of marital faithfulness and trust.

Readers can tell that Shobha De is trying to get people's attention in "*Socialite Evenings*." The chasm of comforting Marital bliss isn't always easy to achieve due to issues with communication, mental unity, and emotional bonds. There are a lot of moving parts, including trust, understanding, fidelity, and loyalty. In addition to this, the most important characteristics are the ability to satisfy one's mental and physical requirements as well as one's sexual desires.

Priorities must include a "give and take policy," a strong feeling of mutual respect, and a willingness to sacrifice. We have to get through the rain before we can see the rainbow's colors. In light of this, a couple must exert every effort to overcome the obstacles and negativity in their lives if they want to enjoy everlasting marital love and harmony.

### Objectives

- To analyze Shobha De's "*Socialite Evenings*" for its depiction of marriage in society.
- To delve into the impact of Karuna's marital disillusionment on her psychological and emotional well-being.
- To delve into the patriarchal aspects of the novel's portrayal of marriage.
- To place "*Socialite Evenings*" in the context of the larger feminist discussion of liberty, identity, and marriage in English literature from India.
- Examine the novel's depiction of the roles played by marriage as a transactional mechanism in the lives of metropolitan Indian elite women.

### Literature Review

Tyagi (2008) <sup>[14]</sup> stated that postcolonial feminist criticism is one of the main frameworks that have been used to examine "*Socialite Evenings*." Indian women writers frequently face both Western patriarchal influences and native customary restraints, as pointed out by Ritu Tyagi, who investigates the ideological foundations of postcolonial feminism. This two-pronged criticism is on full display in "*Socialite Evenings*" by Shobha De, which depicts marriage as a patriarchal institution that limits women's autonomy. Karuna's disillusionment stems from more than just a broken romantic connection; it represents a fight against the ideals of a submissive wife. Scholars from the feminist tradition interpret Karuna's defiance of traditional gender roles as a statement of independence from a social and cultural context that gives women little room to stand up for themselves.

Anita (2005) <sup>[10]</sup> analysed that the existential and emotional crises that Shobha De's female characters face are the focal point of her critique of these characters. In "*Socialite*

*Evenings*," Karuna's discontent with her marriage stems from issues of self-discovery rather than infatuation. She thinks marriage will help her feel more secure and worthy of herself, but instead, she feels spiritually empty and emotionally distant after being married. Nair contends that De interprets Karuna's disappointment as a commentary on the larger challenges faced by Indian women seeking self-definition outside of traditional familial responsibilities. So, the novel turns into a story of coming into one's own, with the protagonist's dissatisfaction with marriage catalyzing her quest for autonomy.

Mishra (2003) <sup>[8]</sup> examined how De's works, such as "*Socialite Evenings*," depict marriage as fundamentally unequal. In his essay, Mishra made the case that marriage is a patriarchal institution that allows men to exert control over women by limiting their freedom of movement, social identity, and sexuality. Marriage limits Karuna's artistic aspirations and silences her in a culture that treats her more like a commodity than a companion. Through its depiction of the silencing of women's emotional and psychological needs in the sake of maintaining male power and family honor, the work provides a scathing critique of the structural imbalances inherent in marital relationships.

According to Jatin (2003) <sup>[5]</sup>, women writers like as De use narrative form to emphasize female autonomy, in her research on gender and narrative tactics. From the very beginning of "*Socialite Evenings*," Karuna's story is structured in a way that highlights her need to be heard and seen, particularly with her broken marriage. In stark contrast to her life as a voiceless wife, Jain argues that the novel provides a literary arena in which the heroine regains control of her narrative. As a theme, the struggle between patriarchal expectations and women's self-assertion is emphasized by the contrast between quiet and voice.

Pathak (1999) <sup>[11]</sup> said that Shobha De is in the company of authors who reveal the superficiality of metropolitan elite marriage. "*Socialite Evenings*" depicts marriage as a place of social conformity, emotional indifference, and monotony, devoid of any holy or romantic overtones. Urban women, like Karuna, are expected to adhere to conventional norms even when they are exposed to modern values and possibilities. This estrangement is symbolized by her marriage. Karuna isn't the only woman caught between modernity's veneer and tradition's weight; many women experience a crisis of intimacy, as shown by the emotional emptiness and fake warmth in their relationships.

As per Singh (1991) <sup>[12]</sup>, De's portrayal of marriages between Indian aristocrats as superficial and transactional is inaccurate. Social status and outward appearances take precedence over genuine feelings in Karuna's marriage in "*Socialite Evenings*." Singh notes that the novel treats marriage as a business transaction, where preserving one's reputation and position takes precedence over one's happiness. In elite circles, the commercialization of relationships is at its worst, with commitment and love put on the back burner in favor of success and approval from others. After coming to terms with this deception, Karuna rejects her marital role and embarks on a journey of self-discovery.

### Methodology

This study takes a feminist literary perspective on marriage relationships by using a qualitative and interpretative methodology. Reading and analyzing specific passages,



conversations, and narrative structures that shed light on marital emotional conflict, gender roles, and power relations constitute the main data set for the research. We look for trends in marital discontent, individual agency, and social pressure by thematic coding and analysis of these passages. To set the scene and back up the study, secondary data consists of academic papers, critical essays, journal articles, and feminist theoretical works. These sources provide valuable context for the subject by situating it within larger frameworks of literary and gender studies. This study interprets the book through the lens of liberal feminist and postcolonial theory, drawing on the work of scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Simone de Beauvoir. References for all sources are based on the Modern Language Association's 9th edition guidelines.

### Analysis

Using a qualitative literary analysis approach influenced by feminist and sociocultural theories, this "*Socialite Evenings*" review focuses on the social, emotional, and psychological aspects of marital relationships. The study analyzes the portrayal of marriage as an arena for gendered power conflicts, drawing on primary data found in the novel's narrative, character arcs, and dialogues as well as secondary data found in critical essays, feminist interpretations, and academic reviews.

The heroine Karuna serves as a prism through which Shobha De examines the superficiality of elite marriage vows. Analyzing her thoughts and interactions with herself reveals that her marriage lacks emotional resonance and friendship. The relationship is characterized by an imbalance of power: her spouse exerts his authority through social superiority and emotional distance rather than physical dominance. The mental anguish Karuna experiences, as shown in her introspection and subsequent disengagement, is understood through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the "Other" in marital arrangements.

At first, her spouse and society's expectations of her as a "wife" define her more than her pursuit of self-actualization. The postcolonial feminist perspective sees Karuna's existential and emotional misery as indicative of the broader limitations experienced by Indian women, especially in affluent metropolitan areas. She possesses material wealth and social standing, but she is deprived of emotional support and intellectual company, echoing Chandra Talpade Mohanty's belief that Western ideas of empowerment frequently overlook the culturally unique oppressions experienced by women in the Third World.

Karuna is unable to escape her traditional roles, which put societal status ahead of her happiness, even if she has access to modern technology. Research also reveals that De reflects marital estrangement through the symbolic narrative components she employs. Narrative techniques that indicate Karuna's inner change include her tendency toward art, literature, and other women, her repeated stints of solitude, and her unsuccessful efforts to connect with her spouse.

In line with Jasbir Jain's remark that De's first-person narrative is a means of recovering female subjectivity in a world dominated by men, the novel's structure, which is structured through Karuna's self-reflective voice, supports this view. One common theme in De's writings, as revealed by secondary critical sources, is that marriage is frequently an act, kept up for the sake of social acceptability. This mask falls off in "*Socialite Evenings*" when Karuna opts for

a unique expression rather than fitting in with others. Her epiphany that emotional submission in marriage is more like a gradual loss of identity than a sacrifice is important to the explanation.

Literature review and feminist theory evidence reveal that Karuna's refusal to marry is a feminist act of deconstruction of patriarchal domination, rather than a specific act of rebellion. As the story progresses, De reveals how marriage rewards submission and punishes disagreement, therefore reinforcing the institutional stifling of women. De is allegedly writing in opposition to conventional gender scripts, and the secondary sources lend credence to this reading.

By combining theoretical analysis with thematic mapping and textual interpretation, this study proves that "*Socialite Evenings*" is an intervention by feminists. It calls into question the romanticization of marriage, reveals the emotional labor that is skewed toward women, and supports the pursuit of identity outside of the home.

### Discussion

Within the framework of privileged Indian culture, Shobha De's "*Socialite Evenings*" offers a critical perspective on marriage. By exposing marriage for what it is—a socially sanctioned system of control, conformity, and transactional value—the book challenges the traditional view of marriage as a place of emotional fulfillment and connection. In this analysis, feminist literary theory is applied to the protagonist Karuna's disillusioned marriage to dissect the ways in which patriarchal expectations and gender roles shape marital dynamics.

Less based on emotional attachment and more on social advancement and physical attractiveness, Karuna's marriage is typical of many urban, upper-class Indian unions. The prospect of security and respectability lures her into marriage, but she soon realizes that she will be emotionally and intellectually alone in her new life. The power dynamic in the relationship is highlighted by her husband's apathy, along with the demands of submission and quiet. Binod Mishra argues that marriage in De's books is a power structure that marginalizes the voice of women rather than a reciprocal relationship.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Karuna's suffering is reflective of systemic gender norms that limit women to traditional roles, rather than an isolated individual story. There is little room for personal development or emotional candor when conforming to the stereotype of the "ideal wife" is the norm. In this context, Ritu Tyagi's postcolonial feminist paradigm shines a light on the persistence of patriarchal systems even in supposedly free and independent metropolitan settings (Tyagi 157).

Until she starts to take charge of her life, Karuna stays emotionally trapped in the home despite her exposure to contemporary lifestyles. A rejection of marriage as a commodity is shown by Karuna's narrative arc, which takes her from a submissive wife to an independent woman. As Sushila Singh so astutely points out, high society marriages are transactional, with public image and social status taking precedence over emotional attachment (Singh 143). Karuna's radical break from her marriage is a statement of her existential autonomy rather than a simple act of defiance. She embodies a feminist awakening that questions the sacredness and inviolability of marriage through her quest for self-definition and increasing self-awareness.

Emotional expectations placed on married women are also criticized in the book. Karuna is emotionally neglected and physically exhausted from her several roles as a companion, social ornament, and caregiver. Jasbir Jain notes that De gives her female characters agency and gives them a voice again by having them relate their stories from the first person and using narrative voice (Jain 98). Utilizing this method, Karuna can reframe her narrative in “*Socialite Evenings*” as an empowered woman who takes responsibility for her life after realizing her marriage was a failure.

“*Socialite Evenings*” paints a picture of marriage as a dysfunctional institution that puts groupthink ahead of people's needs, especially women. By painting a complex picture of mental desolation and societal pressure, the book challenges the notion that marriage is a panacea for women's safety and happiness. Through the prominent portrayal of marital discontent, emotional suppression, and the fight for independence, Shobha De brings her story into harmony with feminist demands for individual agency and defiance of patriarchal conventions.

### Conclusion

“*Socialite Evenings*,” written by Shobha De, takes a hard look at marriage as an institution from the perspective of a woman's mental and emotional journey. The story rips apart the ideal of a happy marriage that many people, particularly women from privileged urban backgrounds, believe in. Marriage, as depicted by Karuna, can serve as a mechanism for societal control by encouraging conformity, stifling individuality, and prohibiting emotional reciprocity. By drawing on feminist literary theory and postcolonial critique, this study demonstrates how De questions traditional gender norms and brings attention to the hidden emotional pain that women experience in marriages that appear to be going well.

The research showed that Karuna's transformation from a docile wife into a strong woman represents the defiance of repressive gender roles in the home. Resistance against patriarchal structures that value appearances over authenticity is manifested in her narrative voice and emotional independence. This study emphasizes the significance of female agency in reshaping societal identities and personal relationships through analyzing texts from various sources.

Finally, “*Socialite Evenings*” is a scathing indictment of a system that promotes submissiveness and selflessness as means to achieve social acceptance, rather than just depicting a woman's broken marriage. In challenging conventional wisdom and championing individual agency in the face of emotional pressure, De's writing serves as a literary platform. An important addition to feminist Indian literature, De's subtle storytelling draws attention to the emotional void in modern marriages while simultaneously creating room for women to assert themselves.

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