

## **Man-Woman Relationship in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* and Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings***

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**Abstract-**The relationship between man and woman has undergone tremendous changes throughout the ages. History shows that this relationship has been altered in many aspects. In the modern era women express their desire to be recognized as strong individuals. She is seen to consider her independence and her choices very seriously. Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De, in their novels *Roots and Shadows* and *Socialite Evenings*, express the rebellion and protest existing in man-woman relationship. Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* exposes the imbalance existing in the man-woman relation in the social institution called marriage. She raises her protest against the inequality present in man-woman relationship and tries to bring a balance between the two. Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* expresses women as sexually liberated individuals existing in man-woman relationship. They do not adhere to the social code of conduct assigned to them by the society. They design new ways and create new opportunities to fulfil their physical, emotional and psychological needs.

**Key Words:-** Socialite, patriarchal, marginalization, chauvinistic, romanticism

### **Man-Woman Relationship in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* and Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings***

The relationship between man and woman has undergone tremendous changes throughout the ages. History shows that this relationship has been altered in many aspects. Especially, the gender roles between man and woman have made this into one of the most complex human relationships. What was once a relationship based on equality, has gradually turned into a patriarchy type, where men have more authority. These changes not only affect the dynamic between the sexes, but also affect the way the society treats their women.

The modern era witnesses a role reversal of sorts. Now, women express their desire to be recognized as strong individuals. She is seen to consider her independence and her choices very seriously. As Indian English novelists Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De express the rebellion and protest existing in man-woman relationship in their novels. Their focus is on women living in the modern Indian society. Both the writers portray an authentic representation of the metropolitan life, family and culture that affect the existing patterns of man-woman relationship.

Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* presents realistically the complex web of man-woman relationship. She is not happy with the state of women in India where they are expected to submit themselves to the whims and fancies of their male counterparts. In one of her interviews with Geetha Gangadharan, she voices her anguish thus, "I have a strong feeling that until very recently women in our society have been looked upon as breeding animals. They have no other role in life. I have a very strong objection to treating any human being in that manner".

Shashi Deshpande exposes the imbalance existing in the man-woman relation in the social institution called marriage. Padmini, in *Roots and Shadows*, being under strict rules and restrictions in her parental home, is more willing to get married. She considers marriage as the passport to her freedom and liberty. Contrary to her expectations, she finds herself under more restrictions. As Simone de Beauvoir comments, "The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness – there is no such thing as assurance in regard to happiness – but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine" (496).

*Roots and Shadows* explores Indu's urge to assert her identity and her longing to be liberated from the restrictions of the society. Being trained to be a meek and submissive girl, Indu rebels against Akka, the head of her maternal home, who represents age-old traditions. Her rebelliousness pushes her to marry Jayant, a man of different caste. She leaves her parental home with dreams of living a life of freedom. She hopes that her marriage will give her a sense of belonging, a sense of being loved and needed. She believes that her marriage will free her from all the restrictions imposed on her in her ancestral home. Her love for Jayant makes her surrender herself whole-heartedly to him. Contrary to her expectations, she finds herself trapped as a wife. She says,

I had thought I had found my alter ego in Jayant. I had felt that in marrying him, I had become complete. I had felt incomplete, not as a woman, but as a person. And in Jayant, I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self, not only that but total understanding, perfect communication. And then, I had realized this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. (114-115)

Jayant behaves like an ordinary Indian husband and this disappoints Indu. He expects Indu to fulfil all his expectations and desires and submit herself to his authority. Indu is filled with bitterness when she realizes that all her longing to be free will never happen. All her dreams are destroyed and it dawns upon her that, "Behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage, after all, but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue" (3). His practical approach to life dissatisfies Indu both physically and emotionally. She is taken for granted by her husband. Her marital life is void of love and Indu wonders, "And anyway, love, that's a word I don't really understand...What I feel for Jayant...can I compress all of it within this word? (88-89).

Indu's marriage fails to give her freedom and happiness. She is burdened by the bonds of marriage and the realization that her dreams are shattered makes her all the more miserable. When Atya asks her whether she is happy with Jayant, she promptly replies, "Happy? Who can say that? But I know I can't be without him" (67). Akka's prediction regarding Indu's marriage, "Such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages...it's all right for a while. Then they realize" (68), comes true.

Indu's dissatisfaction with Jayant does not stop her from her efforts to please him. She fails to feel complete without her husband. She takes a short break from her marriage and her husband when she visits her ancestral home. During this period, she feels his absence so much that she feels completely lost without him. This break from her husband helps her realize her love for him. She says,

This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant I had not known it...that there was, somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant, and lost the ability to be alone. (31)

Indu decides to return back to her husband even though she knows the truth that her marriage is a failure. Even her short affair with Naren, her childhood friend, does not prevent her from returning to her husband. Shashi Deshpande justifies Indu's affair with Naren in the context of psycho biological needs. As Neena Arora remarks, "Man considers it as a normal behaviour to satisfy his desires at both the emotional and the physical levels outside marriage..." (61), Indu also fulfils her psychological and biological needs through her affair with Naren. She gradually understands that Jayant has never compelled her to submit but that she has done it on her own accord to prove everyone that her marriage is a success. Finally, she realizes her mistake as she says, "step by step, I realize now, that it was not for love, as I had been telling myself, but because I did not want conflict" (159).

*Socialite Evenings*, Shobha De's first novel, is the story of Karuna, an urban Indian socialite. At home and at school, she is the only child with a discipline problem. While her sisters Swati and Alak concentrate on improving their grades, Karuna is enchanted by the "Dirty, overcrowded, impersonal

and entirely wonderful" (13) Bombay. Her longing to get out of the boring middle-class environment encourages her to act differently, as she is not rich.

Karuna's relationship with Bunty gives her high hopes of redemption from the manacles of her middle-class life. But her friend Anjali, who has a "wild reputation" (12), dismisses him nonchalantly saying, "Sweet and all that... but not husband material" (56). As pointed out by Anis Pratt, Karuna experiences,

a transformation of the personality, a centering upon personal, rather than patriarchal space... The radical otherness of women's experience is borne out in the eccentricity, a patriarchal outcome, and arcane symbolism that characterize fiction dealing with women heroes who complete the ultimate quest for human adulthood. (135,138)

Karuna's short affair with the ad filmmaker speeds up her decision to break off her engagement with Bunty. Also, she rejects the advances of the ad filmmaker who intrudes upon her with his chauvinistic approach and marries the man who pursues her fervently and refuses to take no for an answer. Impressed by his "head-on, dead-on approach" (58), Karuna marries the man. Once married, Karuna realizes that she has married "the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time" (65). She finds her husband dull and boring. He remains "just an average husband – unexpected, uninspiring, and untutored" (65). She finds herself on par with her friends who are also stuck with similar husbands and live a life "sans passion, sans anything" (65). She identifies herself with them as she expresses, all of us in our little women's club agreed it wasn't the husbands who were the real villains. Poor fools – they were simple and uncomplicated and, therefore, happy creatures. It was us with our denuded anger who were miserable. But how could we communicate anything at all to men who perpetually sat reading the business pages of The Times of India while concentratedly picking their noses? (66)

In spite of her mother's warning, "Marriage is nothing to get excited or worried about. It's just something to get used to" (68), Karuna still dreams of a perfect marriage,

The marriage that was as far removed from the uninspiring one I was in as the stars were from us. A marriage full of laughter and conversation. One in which the two of us were perfectly in tune. Speaking the same language, thinking the same thoughts, enjoying the same things. (68)

Karuna, gradually, refuses to acknowledge the gender roles assigned by the society and tries to create her own space of existence. As Shobha De writes in *Selective Memory: Stories from My Life*, A woman could walk out of a perfectly secure marriage out of boredom? Karuna the main protagonist is not a bitch, if anything she is far too sensible and controlled. But she's one who recognizes her marriage for what it is - empty. Her husband isn't a wife-beater, a drunkard or a gambler. There isn't any reason to leave him, yet that is what she does. Lack of communication is a valid enough explanation for her. (330)

Karuna's desire to have a perfect relationship with a man drives her to fall for a married man, whom she meets in one of the boring office parties of her husband. The affair ends abruptly when the man settles in a distant town and dies shortly after. Karuna assumes that he must have died of boredom.

Anjali, married to Abe, trapped in a similar meaningless marriage, like that of Karuna, whiles away her marital boredom with a long list of men. Unlike Karuna, who yearns for an emotional bond, Anjali has short flings with all her men. She is convinced that she needs a man next to her and hooks as many men as possible with her satiny nails. Karuna's intimacy with Anjali as expressed in the lines below, Anjali was someone out of all those silly novellas we'd read in school come alive. I wanted to be her. But I was also afraid for she seemed to represent everything I had been brought up to believe was wrong and evil. Perhaps that was what made her so irresistible. (11)

Karuna finds herself totally fascinated by Ritu, another socialite, as she contemplates, Ritu...was everything I wasn't. She was spontaneous, I was inflexible. She was shallow, vibrant, buoyant and fun. I was anxiety-ridden and tense when I was not anxiety-ridden and bored. And the best part about Ritu was that while she enjoyed every nugget of the attention she got, she didn't use the power she had over men the way some women did. For her it was all just fun. (109)

Though flattered by all the attentions she receives from other men, her marriage is not threatened by all these flings. She tells Karuna that "men, like dogs, could be conditioned through reward and

punishment" (87). Her only grouse against her husband is his "lack of drive and general unadventurousness" (108).

The protagonists of *Socialite Evenings* do not confine themselves to Alexander Walker's opinion on marriage. As he writes,

The advantages resulting from the states of marriage are that the two sexes may reciprocally satisfy the 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 the 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. (78)

According to Indian philosophy the relationship between a man and a woman is never considered as a relationship between two equals. A woman is not supposed to have an identity of her own and thus she has none. In case she has an identity, it is possible to have been conferred upon her by the male. She is expected to behave according to the prescribed codes of the society. Marriage, a social institution, is seen as something that permits a woman to maintain her social dignity. She accepts marriage as a way of escape from all the restrictions imposed on her in her parental home. Unfortunately, she finds new restrictions in addition to the old ones. The choice to set herself free or to abide by the rules of marriage is finally hers.

Shashi Deshpande, the Sahitya Akademi Award winning Indian woman novelist in English, recreates the experiences of middle-class Indian women who are caught in a strained and oppressive man-woman relationship. Her strong belief, that a woman must live within her relationship, is strongly expressed in all her novels. Though she is not happy with the plight of Indian women and expresses her disapproval through her novels, she does not want to break free from the existing social patterns. She raises her protest against the inequality present in man-woman relationship and tries to bring a balance between the two. *Roots and Shadows* comes as a sample for her stand in the man-woman relationship.

Shobha De, a modern novelist, voices her opinions against the marginalization of women and gives her thoughts expressions through her writings. *Socialite Evenings* expresses women as sexually liberated individuals existing in man-woman relationship. They exhibit their longings and desires without inhibitions and are more demanding and sure of what they expect in their relationship with men. They do not adhere to the social code of conduct assigned to them by the society. They go off on a tangent when they do not receive what they expect in a relationship. They design new ways and create new opportunities to fulfil their physical, emotional and psychological needs. They do not settle down for the mediocre but strive for what their hearts desire.

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