

## Identity Crisis in Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings*

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### Abstract

Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* is a critical exploration of the lives of the urban elite in Mumbai, highlighting the superficiality, materialism, and emotional emptiness that define their existence. Through the protagonist, Karuna, the author delves into the shallow pursuit of wealth, beauty, and social status, exposing the contradictions of a glamorous world that praises appearance over authenticity. The novel critiques the alienation and emotional isolation experienced by the people in the society. In a world dominated by power dynamics, manipulation, and betrayal Karuna's journey reflects the internal conflict between personal desires and societal expectations. Ultimately, *Socialite Evenings* raises questions about the cost

of pursuing external success and the true nature of happiness, suggesting that material wealth and social prestige cannot provide lasting fulfilment.

**Keywords:** Superficiality, Self-independence, Betrayal, Manipulation, External Success

Karuna, the youngest among three daughters is basically from Satara village near Bombay. Karuna's childhood days are not much memorable for her. She is considered to be disobedient and argumentative. Due to her father's transfer, they move to Bombay. Karuna is so much intent with a new urban lifestyle. She is a unique character in her home. The psychology of Karuna is very different from her family members. Karuna is much attracted towards city life while her family members feel uncomfortable in the adjustment to such modern living. Karuna loves to enjoy Bombay life because it gives her freedom to earn and enrich her life. Karuna is always fascinated towards high society and especially impressed by the character called Anjali, fashion designer. She always feels ashamed of her status in the middle class so every time she tries to hide the reality from others. Karuna's dreams are uncountable and however she creates a deep impact on Anjali.

Karuna's wishes have no boundary of limitation. As Karuna belongs to a typical traditional family she hates the restrictions of her father. Being from a conventional family, she protests to stick on to values of orthodox norms. She always speaks against her father for such customs. To be cited Karuna ignores her father's traditional sacraments. With dreams of high society and standard living, she comes across Charlie. Both studies in the same school, gradually become good friends. Charlie is working in an ad agency which is very model in society. Karuna's bond with him additionally makes her modern. So Karuna's parents hate their friendship. Karuna's dreams come to light when Charlie insists her photograph for advertisement. Her conscience plays a dual role whether to surrender her photo or to adhere to the family norms. Charlie's friendship makes her grew confident in herself and agrees to do. Being modernised in thought, Karuna agrees Charlie's demand. On the other hand, she is able

to judge her father's reaction too. This is the first stage where she searches for her own identity and takes decision.

Karuna's photograph in the advertisement column is a sudden thunderbolt for her father. It is crystal clear when he starts to scream "When did you do this? How dare you? Do you want to disgrace us completely? This is not something girls from respectable families do. How did this photograph get here? Disgraceful! Cheap! Filthy! No Brahmin girls have ever stooped so low. Tell me – how did this photograph get here?"(20). Karuna's father slaps her left and right, but in no way it makes any changes. He warns her not to do it again. Karuna consecutively moves forward for her search of identity. Karuna persists with the world of modelling. The novel reveals that there are two different types of characters in one family. A dominant father, suppressive sisters and mother and the other is the feminist character, Karuna.

The article exposes that there are two different mentalities in a family. Karuna rebels and continues her work with an ad agency. Her life turns into a new corner when a boy named Bunty comes into her life. They meet at the cigarette campaign and become friends. This is also against her father's wish. Due to such attitude Karuna's father gets fed up and starts to avoid her. Later she gets an opportunity from Delhi. And this chance provides her the feelings of independence status of her life. With this journey and fulfilment of freedom, later she flies to New York.

This is the time where she is totally free from her family, Anjali as well as the traditional environment. She discovers her individual self. She says "I hadn't come all these miles from home to reconnect with the past and with people I'd left behind. This was going to be my Brave New world trip. I was going to find about myself. America was supposed to be my experiment with adulthood. I want to take charge, assume responsibility, and find direction"(146). Her present personality leads her to take decision to break up an engagement with Bunty. Karuna is at the top position in her life. Further she considers that the marriage proposal with Bunty

will stop her life progresses as an individual. Karuna expects for a space after returning from abroad she immediately declares everyone about her breakup with Bunty. It is evident that Karuna's Newyork life has given the taste of self identity.

Karuna's progressive life and clear decisions leads her to the stage of individual freedom. Karuna believes in financial sound life. She gets marriage from Shetti, a good business man of import export firm Karuna without any question marries to him. With zero financial problem and rich life Karuna initially enjoys her living and obeying all words of her husband. Though she enjoys the wealthy life, she has no time to share her feelings with her husband. Her husband is always busy in his stuffs. Instead she passes time chatting with Anjali. Karuna has luxury but whole day she passes time chatting with Anjali. As time passes she realizes that she is leading a meaningless life. she says "My marriage went sour because I'd married the wrong man for the wrong reasons at the wrong time"(94).

Karuna's life becomes loveless and boring. Even couple has no physical bond this makes a horrible combination of life and relationship. Absence of emotion has no solution. This is an image of Indian housewives. Karuna says "We were reduced to being marginal people. Everything that mattered to us was trivialized. 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 heads and four square meals a day"(147). At this stage, Karuna requires emotional support. She expects for a humanity attitude man who can understand her internal thoughts. At this juncture, she comes across men at the party. She gets emotionally involved with Krish. Karuna and her new friend have led the same relation in their personal life with their life partners. Karuna and Krish are like the similar poles, who share their good time. Both love each other's company. But all is only temporary because Krish moves back to Coonoor. So again Karuna is left alone in her life. Karuna's life becomes more miserable.

Karuna prolongs to involve with Krish, her husband's friend. Krish and Karuna fall in love with each other. As they both were married there are certain life customs to continue their relationship. They hide this relation from their family members. As a woman, Karuna cannot lead a habitual life. She wants to spend more time with Krish. Both leaves to London and enjoys their life. It is a castle in air for Karuna.

Karuna's husband came to know about her affair with Krish through love letters. He expresses his anger towards her. Her husband threatens to throw her out of his house. But Karuna has no fear. Shetti's hard and rude behaviour moulds her strong and bold. The situation paves way to realize about her husband. Karuna never hesitates to discuss her family issues with Krish. Karuna expresses her relationship with emotional attachment. Karuna explains why she involves with Krish. Karuna says "I love this friend of yours and I want to be with him in Venice. There is a good change that I will feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. Maybe he will have some truly foul personal habits that will disenchant one. In which case it will really be in Venice"(186).

Karuna's pregnancy makes her like flying in the air. Unexpectedly, Karuna assuming it to be good news reveals it to her husband. But unfortunately, her husband blames this baby to be of Krish. It is one of the most shocking reactions faced by Karuna. Further this circumstance leads to divorce. There are lots of question arises in Karuna's mind like what to do next? Where to live? As Karuna belongs to traditional family, she knows that after hearing such news her parents are also disappointed. At one point this incident gives Karuna a way to cut off the meaningless marriage life. She finds herself her own identity. Karuna leaves her husband's home.

Karuna has no permanent accommodation. On one side, as she is carrying a baby, she has her motherly responsibility and on another side she does not get the support from anyone. But Anjali helps her to stay in her home. Karuna plans for abortion as she wants herself free

from all responsibilities. She says “I wouldn’t stay even in my parent’s house for free. I’m not a sponger. I feel very embarrassed living off you like this. Hospitality is one thing charity quite another. I’d definitely like to move out till that flat is fixed up.(149)”. Now the situation of Karuna has become more miserable. She has no job. This is the time where Karuna starts her individual journey to search for herself. Karuna once again tries to find a job. She is doing freelancing, modelling and, even small projects for television. She also tries in theatre, magazines and even with the job of photography. She does a job from dusk to dawn but she has no satisfaction in earning money.

Later her luck works and she gets a role in Hindi drama. She comes to contact with Girish, a film-maker. He proposes her a role in the film but Karuna rejects his offer. As time passes her parents accept her wholeheartedly. They offer her to come to the home but Karuna does not want to become burden for anyone. So, she refuses to go with them. Karuna faces all the challenges very bravely and does a great quest for identity. After some time her husband also realises his mistake and feels guilty for the step of divorce. He needs her back but it is too late. Karuna also aborts. Karuna declares “I don’t even want to see you again. I let you in this time but never again. I’ll call the cops if you try and invade my home in future”(256).

Karuna enjoys her work with all dedication. She is very hard working. As a script writer she becomes popular. She has all luxury with sound earning. She rejects Girish’s marriage proposal. Because she does not want any problems in her life as well in her success. Due to her unfortunate experiences, she is unable to trust any male. Karuna’s mother has wishes to remarry her with Krish but Karuna disagrees. She wants to enjoy her success, freedom, self-identity and singlehood. The view of Karuna is quite different from her mother.

When we think of adjustment at that time each woman has a dissimilar psychological stage of expression and understanding. Here the research reveals the search for identity is a continuous journey of the protagonist until she gets a satisfactory stage of living with individual

freedom. When one thinks of traditional women they have multiple responsibilities of their life. Here Karuna has different difficulties at various stages of her life. In this journey of search for identity she faced a lot of untold complications. She suppresses herself too much for adjustments and in the final stage of the novel, she becomes independent. She has her own identity. Women have to do compromises and have to adjust according to the norms of male dominant society. Here Shobha De focuses on economical independence as well as self independence. Women are viewed as inferior to men in Indian society, but modernisation and education demand equality and respect in the outside world, and by exposing their identities women are treated equally.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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