

**Consciousness Raising in the New Woman of Shobhaa De's novels *Starry Nights* &  
*Socialite Evenings***

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**Abstract**

Women have been the “Second Sex” for far too long and there are parts of the world where the patriarchy still has the noose of suppression hanging around women’s necks. In India, women are treated like goddesses as long as they don’t turn their backs on the ideals of Sita and Savitri; the epitome of self-sacrifice, tolerance, endurance, and blind loyalty towards the men in their life. The New Woman in Shobhaa De’s novels is conscious and well aware of what’s been done to her and is concerned with her personal growth. The research further forays into the comprehension of the insights the New Woman has and how she turns her life around for her betterment through the power of ‘Consciousness Raising’. Catherine McKinnon’s piece on ‘Consciousness Raising’ talks about the radicalization, internalization, and oppression of the women. In the paper, De’s novels *Starry Nights* and *Socialite Evenings* would be analyzed through the lens of McKinnon’s views.

**Keywords:** New Woman, Consciousness Raising, Sexuality, Male Hegemony

**Introduction**

India is the land where the goddesses are fervently worshipped and the believers spend days after days to appease the *Maatas* hoping that they would open up the treasures of their blessings upon their people. As irony would have it, for the longest time it has been the male sex whose deity has been made to be worshipped and obeyed when it comes to worldly matters and dealings. The Hindutva “Laws of Manu” deny the woman any existence besides that of her husband. The ‘*Lakshmana Rekha*’; the mythical line that was drawn to protect *Sita* from *Ravana*; remains intact and unharmed to this day. A boy is born and a ‘messiah complex’ is embedded in him. Venturing out of the sphere of male authority is frowned upon as it is deemed equivalent to breaking the sanctity of *Maryada*; a decorum that women have to follow religiously.

A woman’s every action is questioned and the status quo makes no effort to hide the checks it has placed to bind and confine her. A woman’s marginalized existence has been justified as an act that is necessary for the peaceful progression, prosperity, and growth of domestic life. Unfortunately, this life has carved womanhood into an epitome of sacrifice, tolerance, and docility. The debate on the question of women’s participation and growth in the domestic and public sphere has been going on for years. The Indian woman is, at all times, expected to learn to prioritize the needs, expectations, and aspirations of the men around her over her hopes; which hold no value. A woman’s status in India is only elevated when she becomes a mother. A mother’s ability to shield, protect, and nurture her children and her sacrifices for them makes her revered. As Narasingha Prosad Sil quotes in his book *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment*, “The idea of womanhood in India is motherhood- that marvelous, unselfish, all suffering, ever-forgiving mother. The wife walks behind, the shadow.” (Sil 71)

In the book *Natyashastra*, the forces of male and female energies are respectively referred to as Shiva and Shakti. The word Shiva is derived from the name of a Hindu god while the word Shakti means ‘power’. Instead of placing these forces on an equal pedestal, the Indian culture has

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conveniently rendered the female force; ‘*Shakti*’ to subdue in front of her master, the lord ‘*Shiva*’. Her struggle to break away is, hence, came to be seen as a repulsion towards the ideas of ‘*Shanta*’ (peace) and ‘*Sringara Rasa*’ (love). This submission, unfortunately, has cost the Indian women her identity and power to use her consciousness.

There has been a constant decline in the status of women for centuries. The Indian woman; the embodiment of ‘*Shakti*’ has been coerced into blindly following the model of *Sita*; the ever-loving, ever faithful, self-sacrificing and all pure wife of Rama, who bears no ill will at heart even when her husband; Lord Rama punishes her and her greatness is therefore shown to be lying in her silent suffering. Her inaction and the ability to yield to Rama’s whims and commands have been idealized.

The commodification largely annihilates and corrodes a woman’s self, resulting in the otherization, halting a woman’s advance towards awareness and knowledge. As Rabindranath Tagore had once said, “*Women should acquire pure knowledge for becoming a more mature human being and utilitarian knowledge for becoming a true woman.*” (Tagore 94) The concept of ‘other’ is as primitive as the idea of consciousness; an idea which has been in a constant battle of being repressed and raised ever since male authority deigned to objectify the womankind. For centuries, she’s been treated as an object to pass on. Her childhood is spent abiding by the rules of her father and brothers while her womanhood focuses on the fulfillment of the desires, wishes, and orders of her husband. Simon de Beauvoir talks about a woman’s journey, “*She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother's hold. She will open her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master.*” (Beauvoir 352). The idea of a woman who shows her back to the traditional bounds and customs would repulse the everyday Indian society; where the tools of silence, tolerance, and complicity are considered jewels of a woman’s lives. Though, in reality, these tools are employed to bring a woman’s consciousness in coherence with that of the practices and dictates of male hegemony.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century emergence of a new kind of woman was seen; one who vigorously chased her identity and was not ashamed to assert her self over the will of the males in her life. The definition of the New Woman according to *Feminist – New Style*, a journal (1927) is, ‘*The new woman is a blend of physical freedom, sexuality, and stamina with feminist self-assertiveness and traditional domestic femininity, a woman who can combine pleasure, career, and marriage.*’ The ‘New Woman’ for the longest time was seen as an ambivalent figure, someone who was bound to damn herself and all those who came in contact with her. She was seen as the harbinger of disaster, a destructive force that will only bring tribulations in the times ahead. As Lynn Pykett observes, ‘*The New Woman was by turns: a mannish amazon and a Womanly woman... she was radical, socialist, or revolutionary, or she was reactionary and conservative.*’ (Richardson and Willis 12) In fact, the New Woman was a figure of much aversion, ridicule, and controversy. The sensationalism on the behalf of newspaper journalists and a few novelists made her further unpopular.

These ‘New women’ found a place in the fiction of Shobhaa De (hereafter referred to as De), a renowned Indian columnist, novelist, a former model, journalist, editor, socialite, and a TV personality. The city of Bombay; known as Mumbai now, becomes a character itself in De’s fiction.

Along with looking at this image of New Woman in De’s novels, *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights* (1994), this research paper would observe these novels in the light of Catherine McKinnon’s piece on “Consciousness-raising”.

The paper would resolve to answer the following questions:

1. Who is the ‘New Woman’ in Shobhaa De’s novels?
2. How exactly is she different from mainstream book heroines?
3. How the method of ‘consciousness-raising’ helps De’s female characters to recreate their lost identity?
4. How does this consciousness-raising in third world women be different from the model being practiced in the West?

The term ‘New Woman’ was coined at the fin de siècle (end of the nineteenth century). According to what Sally Ledger has written in her book, *The New Woman, Fiction and feminism at the fin de siècle*,

*'The 'wild woman', the 'glorified spinster', the 'advanced woman', the 'odd woman'; the 'modern woman', 'Novissima', the 'shrieking sisterhood', the 'revolting daughters' - all these discursive constructs variously approximated to the nascent 'New Woman'.'* (Ledger 3)

The shrieking revolt against the New Woman's thirst for discovery of her existence, the meaning of her life, search for her lost identity, and preference to the fulfillment of her emotional self was the result of the alarm and havoc sensed by the Victorian male establishment of the time. Efforts to mar the emergence of 'New woman' went to an extent to declare her infanticide, adulteress, home breaker, and whatnot. Her 'free thinking' and 'liberal ideas' were labeled as the enemies of human and familial relations and a threat to the so-called 'naturalness' of Victorian ideas of marriage, family, motherhood, and womanhood. Ledger points out, *'The 'newness' of the New Woman marked her as an unmistakably 'modern' figure, a figure committed to change and to the values of a projected future.'* (Ledger 5) The 'New Woman' came to symbolize everything that could potentially threaten the stronghold of the established order that preferred the male superiority.

The New Woman's revolutionary outlook, progressive ideas, and an immense belief in her capacity was mistaken as self-serving meanness and earned her a reputation of an 'epicurean'. Her ultra-modern nature and evoked consciousness provoked her to act against the colonization of her body and disorientation of her mind, helping her to decapitate the syndrome of dilemma, indecision, and passivity out of her life. She desired the absolute legitimacy of her womanhood as a human being who has all the rights to perform in all the areas of life and has complete possession of her 'physical constitution'. What makes the New Woman different from other women is that she has an acute understanding of herself and what she wants to pursue in her life; while retaining her unique individuality.

Catherine McKinnon talks about the paralysis of consciousness; a situation when an individual does not have an iota of knowledge about her self. To recover from this paralysis, McKinnon has suggested a feminist model i.e. 'Consciousness Raising'. McKinnon defines consciousness-raising as, *'Consciousness-raising is the major technique of analysis, the structure of the organization, method of practice, and theory of social change of the women's movement. In consciousness-raising, often in groups, the impact of male dominance is concretely uncovered and analyzed through the collective speaking of women's experience.'* (McKinnon 519) The idea is to recover an individual's lost or repressed identity. A deeper understanding of the very system that crushes a woman's identity provides her with the tools to evoke her consciousness.

Talking about a woman's non-personhood McKinnon points out, *'Women's powerlessness has been found through consciousness-raising to be both internalized and externally imposed.'* (McKinnon 520) The dogmatic social and political values could only be demystified when the oppressive gender roles are deconstructed. Consciousness-raising helps a woman to look beyond the worn-out traditions that help sustain the derogatory practices of the sex/ gender system. Femininity has often come to be equated with desirability for men.

The strain between tradition and modernity takes over a huge proportion of an urban Indian women's psyche as she is told at every turn to abide by ideological implications when her being is pulling her into the other direction; a direction towards modernity, where she doesn't have to sacrifice her identity, individuality, will, sexuality and desire. This binary opposition between tradition and modernity makes the 'New Woman' in India a hybrid whose upheavals are maximized tenfold because she keeps shuttling between the worlds of convention and enlightenment. Repeated efforts to muzzle her voice and attempts to fetter her movement frustrate her to the point of retaliation. Being a woman from the third world, having certain aspirations for one's self, and adopting that 'newness' makes the process of being socially ostracized far worse for her than the Western women. Uma Nayantara observes, *'Third world feminism is not a mindless mimicking of Western Agenda in one clear and simple sense. Indian Feminist is a response to the issues related to Indian women.'* (Nayantara 243) While the traditions play a significant role in tampering her efforts towards being a 'free thinker', she never truly shuns her traditional self and is unable to discard all the practices of her culture she has been born and brought up in, out of her life. An Indian woman cannot delineate herself from traditions and customs altogether.

Shobhaa De is one such writer whose women characters wage a war on the forces of patriarchy within the circle of same traditions and norms she's become accustomed to. As quoted in

the book *Indian Writing in English*, 'She slaughters macho males with vengeance, and rattles poisons in her gender with disdain and disregard...and one thing she doesn't stomach is the hypocrisy of any kind.' (Bhatnagar 143).

Before De, esteemed writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Ismat Chughtai, Namita Ghokale, Nayantra Sehgal, Shudha Mazumdar, Amrita Pritam, and Manju Kapur had written female characters in their fictional works who were rebellious, educated and liberal. As Praveen and Dr. Kailash say, 'The early image of a woman in Indian English Novel as a silent sufferer, an incarnation of patience and endurance has gradually been eroded.' (Kumar & Kailash 31) It was a rare occurrence to see rebellious and self-reliant women characters in literature without the pressure of inhibitions clouding her judgments, in the latter part of the twentieth century. While the urban Indian women's lives were etching away from tradition towards the transition into modernity, the women in literature were found in a long period of stasis, blindly worshipping the ideals of goddess *Sita* and *Savitri*. *Sita* threw herself into the burning pyre to preserve her wifely virtue making her an epitome of self-sacrifice. As Susan S. Wadley explains one of the many of these anecdotes that are found in Hindu mythology where '*Savitri; The good wife saves her husband from death, follows him anywhere, proves her virtue, remains under his control and gives him her power.*' (Wadley 122-123) The post-colonial writers are found to be heavily concerned with what an Indian woman wants. Her confusion, dilemma, dissatisfaction with her circumstances and an unquenchable 'want' for change makes her an interesting subject to research and write on.

De's unreservedness and frank telling of sexual incidents have made the orthodox Indian people criticize her as '*Vatsyayani*', '*Soft porn queen*', '*Pasha of pulp*', '*Vamp Feminist*', etc. The in-depth analysis of her works tells otherwise. She makes 'sexual relations' a major theme in her novels and through the use of it she tries to shatter the patriarchy's ideas regarding female sexuality. De was the first of the women novelists in India to reject the idea of fidelity in marriage; as fidelity means one thing for a husband and another for the wife in a typical Indian marriage; because man appears with an unscathed repute on the other side of infidelity and unfaithfulness, but a woman carries the spot of that "grave sin" with her wherever she goes. David McReynolds views critically, '*Nor can a person find his identity in the family for that institution is breaking up.*' (McReynolds 203)

De's writing is experimental and realistic in her telling of the feminine perspective, nature, and psyche. The female consciousness happens to become a pivotal concern in her works. In her article *The Changing Face of New Woman in the Novels of Shobhaa De*, Monika Chaudhry is of the view, '*Her novels represent the woman's challenge to the patriarchal society, that is, women are no longer doormats to trade upon and dirtied.*' (Chaudhary 30) The non-conformist and unconventional attitude of women in De's novels land them in an awkward position when facing the third world conventions and attitudes.

A free woman with liberal ideas has long been perceived as a threat in the modern Indian milieu (in the novels under observation) and these patriarchal motifs could be disentangled through tapping a woman's consciousness.

The main aims and objectives of this paper are to study the image of "new woman" in the selected novels of Shobhaa De; *Socialite Evenings & Starry Nights*, the examination of De's women characters in the light of Catherine McKinnon's piece on "Consciousness Raising" as a feminist method and political practice, to find out De's definition of emancipated, liberated, a free woman along with comprehensive critical analysis of these characters and to explore the differences between the road to struggle women in the third world and first world countries take.

### **Methodology**

Apart from the textual analysis of De's work, this research is qualitative. Through the close reading of De's two novels, the plight of the New Woman in India would be explored. The theory of application is based on the feminist model of Consciousness-raising.

Through this research work, the researchers would realize that all domains of the New Woman's growth; social, political, and psychological deserve investigation. The future investigators and research enthusiasts would be prompted to explore further to enhance and facilitate their understanding regarding the ignored or taboo topics in the subcontinent, which have helped in shaping up the new façade of Indian Culture; the New Woman.

### Data Analysis

The novel *Starry Nights* start with Kishenbai, a small-time producer, passing derogatory remarks about Aasha Rani; a woman he had once helped climb the ladder to Bollywood success. He had an affair with her despite having a wife at home. Now that she has left him for another man he is wishing the worst of everything upon her. Her transgression against Kishenbai's wish to keep her as a 'submissive mistress' is being termed as disloyalty and unfaithfulness on her part. Kishenbai's generalization of all women as being 'unfaithful' is depicting how the social and political values of male superiority are imbedded within the men's minds.

The subordination of a woman and the desire for their domination have found to be a 'need' for the members of the male sex. This need and desire push the men to transcend above the female sex by overpowering her sexuality and hence, suppressing her identity in the process. The culturally coded codes of desirability are designed in a way to prioritize men's needs over the development of a woman's identity.

One of the key points in the Feminist methodology of 'Consciousness-raising' is that a woman as an individual ceases to conform to the rules of patriarchy. She stops to view the social and political values of the sex/gender system as the things that shape up the truthful, natural, unchangeable, and given reality. She tries to know herself and this process of knowing leads her to oppose and question the temporality of these established ideas. Kishenbai's views are shedding a light that how the generational continuity of male practices and perspectives promotes the outlook that women are dependent and feeble beings.

The character of Akshay Arora in the novel shows how toxic masculinity is not only admired but also paves the way for the men for humiliating and insulting the women in their lives at every turn. On the prospect of getting caught in the same room as Aasha, Akshay asks her to leave which elicits the following response from her, '*She isn't my wife. I'm staying right here. I don't care whether it's Malini or Goddess Sita herself!*' (De. 27) Aasha completely refuses to run or walk out of the fear that her secret liaison with Akshay Arora could get exposed in front of his wife. She's telling him that she is not the only culprit in the situation and he is equally involved. In this case, Aasha Rani comes to be seen as morally superior as compared to Akshay as she is holding out the mirror to him. This scene is blatantly exposing, '*The double standard in bourgeois marriage whereby sexual virtue was expected of the wife but not of the husband. ...marriage should be freed from the contamination of male sexual license.*' (Ledger 20)

The hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity have conventionalized infidelity as a part of men's sexual behavior, hence paving the way for naturalization of the gender behavior that is prevalent to date, making women's femininity and sexuality a passive object of the male's active gaze and his desire. In her essay, McKinnon writes,

*Sexuality, then, is a form of power. Gender, as socially constructed, embodies it, not the reverse.* (McKinnon 533)

The patterns of 'generational violence' are visible when Aasha's Amma (mother) is dictating the norms of male hegemony to Aasha and is asking her to follow the herd. The subduction and actions taken upon the Indian women have led their objectification and alienation towards the acceptance of living their lives as a 'the other' or a 'thing' because '*To be man's other is to be his thing. Similarly, the problem of how the object can know herself as such is the same as how the alienated can know its alienation.*' (Meyers 76) Male power makes otherization the very foundation of the female bondage and yet distorts the process in such a way that it not only makes the female agency dependable on the male perspectives but also manages to make itself a myth. A myth that is 'total' and has real consequences but appears to be a mere 'delusion'.

In the late nineteenth century, women were given two options to choose from a "*Mercenary marriage' or penury as a single woman trying to earn a living.*" (Caird 195). Women in metropolitan cities of India had faced a similar demoralizing choice in the latter half of the twentieth century. McKinnon says that the male hegemony views feminine independence as a threat to male identity and that is precisely why their economic independence was halted for so long as to keep them shackled in chains. Aasha's estranged father unfolds in front of her these unquestionable dictates of 'male power' working in Indian society. His articulation of the whole process is quite monumental as he, being the practitioner of the male power himself; goes on to lay bare the workings and doings of the process

that renders a woman invalid and devalued. His description regarding how some males are more dominant than others or their abilities to hide the streaks of superiority, that exist inside their minds, reinstates the fact that 'male power is real' and it exists, '*Men are cruel. Very cruel. There is no justice in this world. And no equality between men and women. Don't believe that marriage alters that balance...The power lies with the purse—remember that. Whoever controls that controls the relationship... The only difference is that some men can control their true feelings of superiority. These men are called 'cultured.' Other men display them openly...Your husband falls in the first category.*' (De. 223) The socio-cultural practices, norms, and dogmas were designed over the centuries to halt a woman's self-cognition through the denial of agency, dehumanization of her 'self', and victimization which makes her identity largely exposed to annihilation.

Aasha decides to put an end to this 'generational violence' by deciding to raise her daughter in a way that she would be able to live her life on her terms. Consciousness raising's main aim is to make women capable of carving their new world, a world that is completely separate from the world men have created for them.

Different social contexts generate different problems. In the West, the consciousness-raising groups were formulated to highlight the female experience by giving voice to the individual aspects of economic and social experiences which helped in drawing out the commonalities and shared experiences. The feminist movement saw its revolution and with it, the status of women went through radical changes after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This political revolution affected and touched the personal lives of dozens of women. Their collective awareness of the inequalities of the sex system brought about a political and personal change that seems unfathomable to the women of the third world to date. It is not to disregard the strengths of the third world women or the struggles undertaken by the women in West but the idea is to put across the fact that the parts of Asia are still miles away from seeing a revolution in the women's lives conditions. Several factors come into play when pondering over that as the majority of the population of these countries staunchly believe that women's gender is not compatible with the positions of power, add upon it the fact that a large number of the female population is content when it comes to viewing their femininity through the eyes of men and reject the idea of being autonomous individuals. This makes the participation in the consciousness-raising groups, in the Indian context, highly unlikely. The awareness to name one's experiences and look out for commonalities cannot subsist in a third world woman's world because negative self-concepts and aversion towards social change are integrated into her mind to the point where she starts believing and preaching to her fellow women that, '*Personal is not the political!*' as she resolutely sees the natural order of things as the only way to be.

De's novel *Socialite Evenings* opens the eyes of the readers to the same fact that how lonely this road to consciousness could be for a young, educated, and bright Indian woman like Karuna. Her struggle starts at home where she is unhappy with familial relations and circumstances she's been living in, where she's at all times reminded of what their society does with girls who like to do things their way. '*Basically, I wanted to get out of the closed, boring, middle-class environment of my family. I wasn't interested in studies. I wanted to be on my own, independent.*' (De 11)

In India, being a female and having aspirations to have one's standing, makes that woman rather unapproved in society. While the same ambitiousness and zeal for life are appreciated in an adolescent man, it is not seen as 'right' when a young woman tries to overstep the bounds. Karuna belongs from a middle-class family and her ministrations make her quite a rebel in the house she lives in and the society she functions in. Her priorities, general attitudes towards life, and inclinations are completely at odds with her two elder sisters who like to do as they are told. This 'uniqueness' and 'newness' is frowned upon; both at her home and outside. Her inability to give in and silently conform makes her the 'new woman in the making'. Karuna dreads the fact that she would end up like her mother someday, quivering and shaking the moment her male master waltz inside the home snapping at her for not being responsible and worthy enough.

Through Karuna's observations of her home life, it's evident that the patriarch rules his family with an iron fist. Karuna's parents' relationship shows that both male hegemony and female inferiority are self-enforcing. The social and political values are internalized in such a way that it takes up the shape of 'normal' without the suppressed party realizing it. The matriarch is burdened with embedding the same rules in her children, to make them look up to the same ideal she has been

made to look up to. She is answerable to the father, who represents the structures of patriarchy. These social relations that are lived every day go on to justify themselves as natural and unchangeable. Karuna's wish to model instigates her father who goes on to tell her what her transgression would cost her:

Karuna is a free spirit who wants nothing more than to carve her way, find herself and this is thought no less of sin as 'male power' does not want women to go hunting for their 'self-concept', they don't want them to find out who they are concerning the world. Their self-discovery is a threat to the power structures of the reality the male hegemony has formed.

Karuna marries just for the sake of settling down. The marriage proves to be loveless and incompatible. Her much older friend and ex-mentor Anjali tell her to become a submissive, humble, and patient wife. Karuna doesn't do that as she doesn't want to live a life of denial but she chooses to look the other way. Hence, her free spirit, her identity is swept away.

Sandra Lee Bartky identifies stereotypes, sexual domination, and exclusion as the three kinds of psychological oppression. Talking further about female shame and condition, she deduces that feelings of inadequacies generated as a result of this oppression "*May color a person's entire emotional life.*". Bartky writes, '*Female stereotypes threaten the autonomy of women not only under their existence but also by their content.*' (Bartky 3) The character of Karuna symbolizes the subconscious oppression of Indian women and her self-loathing, shame, and guilt, which make her a victim of internalized oppression. Karuna's husband is the one with an attitude problem but instead it is causing her to feel guilty. Karuna's husband and his sheer indifference towards his wife have resulted in a complete loss of her identity. He makes her feel invalid and taunts her for being good for nothing. Somewhere, Karuna's unwillingness to bow down in front of structures of heterosexuality has resulted in 'psychological oppression'.

Women in the West are surrounded by more feminist-minded people who help them discover their strengths and weaknesses but asserting one's feminist identity in Indian patriarchal societies, results in the psychological oppression of the worst kind as in the Indian cultural context it's the development of women's mentalities that is targeted. The prominence of male perspectives in Indian setup is mobilized to dangerous ends as the opinions that privilege heterosexual outlook over the diverse range of visions and personal stories, aid in neutralizing and negating the personhood of the one being objectified. Tired of her monotonous life Karuna decides to dress differently for a party. The reaction and attitude of her husband at her attire pushes her to question the things her husband does. The fact alone that Karuna is refusing to dress up the same way as other women at a party is angering her husband. Men's sense of male superiority is so perfectly attuned to their consciousness that they assume that it's their divine right to let 'their women' know how to lead a life the 'right way'. Whenever Karuna is pushed to an edge by her husband she suppresses the urge to reel back. Her identity refuses her to be beaten down to the point of ultimate subservience. Karuna's husband criticizes her without any regard for the psychological effects because to him this systematic oppression is a reality. When an individual is a part of a culture that reduces their race or, in this case, the gender to non-personhood, it has lasting effects. However, it is through the power of a raised consciousness that Karuna doesn't let her husband's opinions affect her.

Karuna still has the traces of her old self inside her as she enforces her assertion time and again. Throughout the novel, it is seen that her consciousness never lets her be at peace with the dominant male practices. She has both the knowledge and vision to be her person. Her womanhood is complete with or without the presence of a man in her life. She goes on to oppose and struggle against the toxic masculinity of men around her. Karuna's banter with her husband usually ends with her saying, '*You know what your problem is? You never cared to understand me as a woman.*' (De 190)

Instead of fading away in her husband's home, Karuna finds refuge by getting into an extramarital relationship with a man named Krish. Instead of blaming the husband's oppression or indifference, Karuna would be awarded the tag of an 'adulteress'; a disloyal and deceitful wife who has broken the trust of a man who happens to be 'faithful, hardworking and loving' in the eyes of the society. Karuna tries interpreting and assuming the reactions of people around her in case they find out about her affair. Her rejection and betrayal of the dutiful and loyal wife's role would undoubtedly unsettle the forces who pushed her into it in choosing the first place as her life was void of happiness.

To this date, there exists a hegemony in the subcontinent that says that infidelity is the ultimate betrayal only when a woman commits it. The fact that Indian common law is biased in the favor of the males doesn't help the situation either. Karuna decides to come clean about the feelings she has for her husband when he confronts her. Karuna's confrontation with her husband about her affair results in her coming to terms with what she wants to do with her life. She questions their marriage and the absence of importance one feels for his/her respective spouse in a marriage. McKinnon states that through consciousness-raising women become aware of their social conditions and social situations. This knowledge helps them to see internalization for what it is and helps them break away from it.

Karuna decides to stay a single woman and decides to help her parents with their lives. She decides to make her real. Breaking away from the submission helps the women see that the forces of powerlessness, violence, and subordination are not only acting in a particular woman's life. These forces are carefully structured political acts that are constantly at work to subjugate women. It is at this point in the novel where De chooses to depict her heroine's reluctance to let go of tradition. Some facets of the tradition are an important part of an Indian New Woman's life. Karuna might have shown frustration for traditional roles in her teen years but her development and growth as a person and her evoked consciousness makes it abundantly clear for her how she would want to lead her life. Karuna's comprehension of her parents' life choices from the start to the end of the novel goes through tremendous growth.

Understanding and demystifying the processes which make women inferior helps them realize that there could be another reality. Through consciousness-raising, women come to know that male hegemony is changeable and that there are other ways of being and knowing. Karuna rejects a friend's proposal of marriage as she is convinced and confident in her future as a single woman. By seeing herself in the image of suppression and by breaking away from it Karuna successfully gets her free spirit back. Realization of the fact that succumbing to the male power is not the only way to exist helps women challenge its temporality and universality. What male reality dictates to be universal is a socially contingent and historical situation that has always gone on to chant that, men are ideal while women are not, men are rational while women; irrational. Consciousness-raising hence proves to be a method to help women to use their knowledge and vision to create their reality just like Karuna did.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

From time immemorial, women have been denied the right to challenge men's universality. De's New Women are exactly the sort of individuals who spit in the face of hurdles placed in front of them and put forth the assertion of their identity by doing things that are radicalizing, scandalous and unconventional to their very core. The Indian New Woman in De's novels is bitter and gets vengeful at times for the wrongs that have been done to her but through the ugly struggles and disagreeable circumstances, she sees a silver lining and learns to annihilate self-blame. It's not only the unreservedness of De's unique writing style that makes the heroines in her books different but how De shifts the focus and emphasis from a woman's external to the interior world: making her struggle largely psychological. The limitations and restricted number of choices push these women to manipulate situations in their favor as they fancy living a life of freedom where they do not have to worry about the consequences of offending those in control. Their allegiance with the concept of "free love" was seen as the lowest form of moral and ethical corruption. De's novels *Starry Nights & Socialite Evenings* are set in the same environment and revolve around women who are trying to make the best out of the worst situation.

With the consciousness of urban South Asian women raising every day, something new is bound to come. A massive duty and responsibility fall on the shoulders of these urban New women and it is to educate the women in the rural or backward parts of their respective countries about the problems and issues their identities are facing. There's a need to establish faith among the rural and urban New women. It is only after accomplishing the development of this shared faith that they would be able to turn their eyes towards community building and formation of groups through the powers of awareness and consciousness-raising. Ending the marginalization of women, promoting gender equity and equality is an urgent need. To realize the importance of gender equality issues, there should be forums created for consciousness-raising on these issues and gender sensitization. There's a need for consciousness-raising among men as well that stirs their minds towards the full cognizance of the

detrimental situation women have been shoved in for years. The intellectuals, writers, and thinkers have the obligation towards changing the paradigm. A paradigm that doesn't idealize and promote the concept of toxic masculinity or norms of patriarchy but acts towards bringing a change that is mostly required against it. A change that is possible when the women are not being portrayed as plus-ones, decorative, nameless, and expendable creatures without minds, vitality, and an agency of their own. For that to happen, the model of the New woman as presented in De's novels needs to be accepted and welcomed.

The aim should be to convince women to share their stories. The more they share it and try to demonstrate, the more likely it is that they could be used for their empowerment, consciousness-raising, self-discovery, therapy, education, and presenting potential solutions. The nihilistic quality to go with the flow and fall right into the created chaos needs to end now and it could be achieved by breaking through the preconceived generalizations and pernicious myths.

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