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'Impediments in Society versus Adjustments' in the Select Novels of Willa Sibert Cather and Shobha De – An Analysis

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Abstract:

The rules and regulations made by man become his own hurdle in the society where he lives. But without that, society cannot be a civilized one. To make the society a civilized one, he or she has to live to the limits and bondages that he or she has created. In living so, the norms and the traditions impede the growth of the individual. The writer watches the impediments in the society and projects it in his literary works. The person who doesn't share the major values of the society feels himself to be an outsider. He or she makes a new bond or overthrows the existing one – marriage bond or any other relationship - hampering their growth. Such a shackle is being dissolved when the problems go beyond limit. The characters of the American Writer Willa Sibert Cather (1873-1947) and the Indian Writer in English Shobha De (1948-) falsify the ideology of suffering within the bonding and overcome the barrier to move forward towards the ladder of success.

Key Words:

Rules and regulations, norms and traditions, impediments, adjustments, society

An analysis is made placing side by side the works of the American Writer Willa Sibert Cather and the Indian Writer in English Shobha De. Willa Sibert Cather ranks as one of the most outstanding women writers of the twentieth century. As it was Wessex and Malgudi for Hardy and R. K. Narayan, so was Nebraska for Cather. Cather occupies a distinct place with twelve novels, no fewer than sixty two short-stories and a large collection of non-fiction to her credit. This analysis is with her novels "O Pioneers!" (1913), "My Antonia" (1918) and "A Lost Lady" (1923).

On the other hand is the Indian Women Writer Shobha De, who is not of less credit. She is one of the most popular women writers in India. She is seen as a model, a copywriter, a journalist, a socialite, a scriptwriter and a bestselling novelist. This is true in the words of Charanji stating Shobha De's skills as, "it is difficult to pigeon hole Shobha De into a single slot because she is a woman of many talents" (Charanji 2004). Her works include "Socialite Evenings" (1988), "Starry Nights" (1991), "Sisters" (1992), "Strange Obsessions" (1992), "Sultry Days" (1994), "Snapshots" (1995), "Second Thoughts"(1996). Her works "Socialite Evenings" and "Starry Nights" are taken for analysis in this paper.

To start off with, the protagonist of Willa Sibert Cather's novel "O Pioneers!"(1913), Alexandra goes against the traditional norms of girls marrying at the age of eighteen to twenty five. She works industriously with the land and ties the marriage knot at the age of forties. The other woman character, placed next to Alexandra in "O Pioneers!" is Marie Shabata. This character is just opposite to Alexandra. Marie Shabata becomes the wife of Frank, a shrewd farmer at a very young age, and towards the end of the novel is shot to death by her husband seeing her in relationship with Emil, Alexandra's brother.

The character Antonia in the next novel of Willa Sibert Cather "My Antonia" (1918) gets involved with a railroad worker who impregnates and abandons her. Without losing heart she with a baby in hand, marries a Czechoslovakian farmer named Cuzak and overcomes the barriers of the society, becomes the mistress of a large and fertile farm and is blessed with dozens delightful children. Towards the end of the novel, she is found "battered" but not "led down", she is "battered but not diminished". She makes her last appearance as a middle aged woman, she is "still there in the full vigour of her personality" (332) not losing the fire of life, as this is how one should have lived.

Another character of Willa Sibert Cather to be in line to throw away the impediments of the society and move forward in life is Marian Forrester in "A Lost Lady" (1923). This character is a terrifying pivotal figure, who begins a gradual process of moral degeneration after an accident which leaves the powerful Captain Forrester an invalid husband. She longs for a life of culture, wealth and sophistication which she can never expect from her husband. Marian takes refuge in the false comforts of alcohol and sexual abandon. John H. Randal in "*The Landscape and the Looking Glass* (1960) states: "The deterioration of Mrs. Forrester's character... reflects the social disintegration about the rising tides of commerce" in Post-World War I America. The character is lost "between the pioneer and commercial generations." Ivy Peters, an eighteen or nineteen year old grown-up boy who is nick named "Poison Ivy" swindles the property of Captain Daniel Forrester after he falls sick and harasses Mrs. Forrester sexually. Even though it is considered ado for the society as a whole Mrs. Forrester comes out of the struggle and returns to her native California after her husband's death and moves to South America remarrying a rich man.

Similar type of characters can also be seen in the novels of the Indian novelist Shobha De. In the novel "Socialite Evenings" of Shobha De, Karuna the main character longs for a luxurious life, ends up in marrying an aristocrat with whom she leads an unexciting life, divorces him because he is just "an average Indian husband – unexciting, uninspiring, untutored" (65) and writes her memoir to escape from her present. Karuna finds her middle class life mundane and longs for an exciting life. This longing takes root in her when the family migrates to Bombay. The richness of the city and the high life of the people attract her more and she prefers to discover Bombay and Bombayites rather than show interest in her studies. The submissive nature of Karuna's mother towards her Father is one of the reasons for her hatred towards the middle class society. The middle class women are first under the control of their father, then

their husbands and later their sons. Their whole life is controlled by someone or the other. They live for their parents or for their husbands or for their children but not for themselves. They do not have a life of their own. They have no time to think of themselves because all the time they worry about the comforts of the men folk.

Karuna is put into such a life in marriage and takes the role like her mother. When her husband criticizes her "a no-hoper" and "never amount to anything" (163) she starts to involve in theatre and have affair with Krish, an married man and a friend of her husband. She accepts the decision of her husband to break up their marriage suspecting her paternity for her pregnancy. She aborts the child. Wanting to live independently makes her to work as freelancer and later in films. She receives awards in her profession and realizes that living alone can also give happiness. She refuses the marriage proposal of Girish, a film maker and also later her husband who grovels at her feet to come back to him. She "carves out her own niche in the professionally competitive world of advertising and acquires all the resources" (Chandra 2000: 147) and unlimited freedom necessary to live an independent life with no man to dictate terms.

Similar to Karuna, is the other character Anjali in the novel who hates middle class life. Anjali, a half-Jain (from her mother's side) and half-Hindu, goes to the extent of changing her religion and marrying a rich muslim, named Abe, years older, an experienced rake with a wild reputation. Later divorces him and starts her hunting expedition for a life partner. Finally ends up in marrying Kumar Bhandari who takes her as his third wife and who is a homo and his partner is Murty, who he says is an orphan. Still hangs on to him as she cannot enjoy the luxuries if she leaves him.

No fewer struggles are found in the character Aasha Rani of "Starry Nights" (1992), Shobha De's sensational novel. Aasha Rani, an "awkward, ungainly, overweight girl from Madras" (Starry Nights: 2), just fifteen when she is introduced to the film world, becomes a film actress after a lot of exploitation in the sex-starved society, rises to stardom, withdraws from acting after marriage, comes back to acting taking mother role to support her parents, is betrayed by her husband and finally settles down as the owner of her father's studio with a dream to introduce her own daughter into the film world.

Moving away from the norms and traditions may fetch one his or her goal and professional satisfaction like Karuna in "Socialite Evenings", changing one's life partner could make his or her life happier as in Antonia in "My Antonia", Marian Forrester in "A Lost Lady" and Anjali in "Socialite Evenings", having an illicit affair may end the life as it happened to Marie Shabata in "O Pioneers!", a late marriage after succeeding in her goal as did by Alexandra in "O Pioneers!" and raising after the betrayal of her husband in "Starry Nights" by Aasha Rani, can prove that they have achieved what they ought to have, but leading a life without adjustments does not give real happiness. The universally acknowledged fact is that the relationships coincide with adjustments to the rules and regulations set by the society.



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