

## **The Evolution of Cosmopolitan Urban Life and Social Dynamics in Shobhaa De's *Socialite Evenings***

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<b>Received:</b> 06-11-2025	<b>Revised:</b> 23-11-2025	<b>Accepted:</b> 13-12-2025	<b>Published:</b> 24-12-2025
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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper explores the cosmopolitan lifestyle and cultural hybridity in Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* through the theoretical lens of Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity. It examines the intersection of traditional values and modern influences within urban living, focusing on affluent characters and their cosmopolitan modes of existence. The study also highlights the evolving cultural landscape of India in the context of globalization. Central to this analysis is the concept of the "new woman," whose engagement in socialite evenings is shaped by cosmopolitan culture and hybrid identities. Situated within the broader South Asian context, the paper investigates how shifting lifestyles have affected the lives of South Asian women, both in the past and the present. While previous scholarship has approached the text from various perspectives, examining it through the lens of the "new woman" offers a relatively underexplored avenue in literary studies. This research thus addresses a significant gap in existing literature by foregrounding a South Asian perspective. The study further emphasizes the importance of examining the survival and negotiation of the "new woman" within cosmopolitan spaces, where women often emerge as the most vulnerable subjects of cultural hybridity.*

**Keywords:** *Cosmopolitan, Cultural Hybridity, Hybrid Identity, Interstice, Socialite, South Asia.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The cosmopolitan lifestyle in South Asia and the evolution of urban living are examined through the hybrid identities of affluent characters in *Socialite Evenings*. Cosmopolitan life is derived from cosmopolitanism, which means individuals belong to a global community, leading to a broadened mindset and a tendency to accept every culture (Binnie et al., 2022). It also helps an individual change their mindset and become a new person. The study probes the term "new woman", which means the modernised woman of society who does not need anyone, can earn for themselves, and can support themselves in almost every way. Basically, it is a character analysis of a character in the selected novel that helps in understanding contemporary society. The research draws on Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity from theoretical grounds. It deals with hybrid cultures and their effects on individuals' lives. Cultural hybridity emerged from the space between two cultures or identities (Easthope). Thus, this article also addresses cultural hybridity.

*Socialite Evenings* is a novel by Shobhaa De about a woman who enters the cosmopolitan world through her newfound fame and how that affects her life. Changes in her mindset, lifestyle, and preferences are also evident in the novel, which shows how a character seeks to improve. The study intends to examine how cosmopolitan living and cultural hybridity address cultural diversity, adapt to the blending of various

cultures, and develop in an increasingly globalised society. The approach chosen for this study is qualitative content analysis. This research, from a cultural hybridity perspective, explores new areas of South Asian culture and South Asian women, thereby advancing existing ideas in the field. It further helps develop knowledge about the cosmopolitan and urban lifestyles of South Asian regions. There is a gap in the study of South Asian women and their evolution toward cosmopolitanism. The rationale of the study is to explore the impact of cosmopolitan living and cultural hybridity on the evolution of urban lifestyles in South Asia, particularly by focusing on the “new woman” depicted in Shobhaa De's novel *Socialite Evenings*. The research addresses the gap in understanding the cosmopolitan evolution of South Asian women's lives and aims to contribute valuable insights into their experiences and challenges. They are so modern that they feel they are under constant surveillance. Because of this, the women of South Asia adopt a cosmopolitan lifestyle, seeking to shed their traditional and cultural roots and adopt Western standards and culture. As it is said, Western standards set beauty standards (Sharma, 2024).

The present study follows the goals of this research: first, to observe people's lives across cultural contexts. Secondly, to use the idea to examine the “new woman” of society in the chosen work. Thirdly, to analyse the novel's cultural hybridity and the characters' ability to survive. Along with that, the following research questions are: What are the effects of cultural hybridity on the “new woman”? How do cosmopolitan lifestyles and cultural disparities alter an individual's perspective, particularly for women? How much do socialite evenings address cultural hybridity against the backdrop of South Asian culture?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section examines various criticisms of the issue researched in this paper, focusing on Shobhaa De, a contemporary Indian novelist. She is one of the well-known and respected personalities in India. She attracted numerous readers and, as a result, received extensive research on her novels. She conducted numerous research projects on her novels, and the selected novel also received some literary attention. Some of them are discussed below. Dr Amit G. Ramteke articulates the feminist approach to the novel's character in his research. He discusses the expression of the rebellious spirit of the protagonist, named “Karuna”, who came out of her middle-class society and joined the upper class. The main point of his research is that the “paper tries to go into a world cruise of Shobha De's feminist attitude in terms of the new moral values against the men's dominance.” (Ramteke, 2022, p. 146). Showing and proving the change in the characters' moral values. He further exclaims that because the writer is a feminist, she further explores the feminine psyche and soul through her writing. He clarifies that the lens of feminism offers a new way of looking at female characters and helps in understanding them. Such as the suppression and oppression, the female characters just wanted to get free from all of that. He suggests that viewing the novel through the mentioned lens helps readers understand its psychological aspects, offering a clearer feminist perspective. This research will also help in this particular research paper, as it will help us understand the modern woman of society. Usha P. Yaul enunciates the rebellious factor in the novel in her research paper. She argues that the female characters reveal the modern woman's inner desire for freedom, bodily pleasure, identity, economic independence, and equality within both the family and society (Yaul, 2015). Further, Yaul (2015) examines the women's suffering and their interpersonal relationships, suggesting that they eventually obtain the rights they desire. She discusses the situations these women are placed in and observes that the novelist presents women who consciously question and resist patriarchal constraints. Shobha De's women demand equal treatment, financial independence, and emotionally supportive spouses. Feeling persistently ignored, they develop an urge to make their existence visible and refuse to remain under their husbands' dominance. It is at this juncture that the rebellious impulse emerges. When the women reach their breaking point, they seek to liberate themselves from the invisible chains that restrict their autonomy and self-expression. This rebellion also reflects the portrayal of upper-class women who display indifference toward public moral judgment, for whom traditional notions of morality appear outdated and

irrelevant. Hence, encourages the factor of rebellion among them. The researcher suggests that “Shobha De tries to present an image of a new woman who is conscious of her rights, confident, and not ready to accept the status of ‘other’ in the family and society” (Yaul, 2015, p.381). This further underscores the rebellious element in the novel's portrayal of its women. This paper also discusses the element of rebellion in women, which became a central part of the discussion. So, this paper will also help our research by providing insight into one aspect of modern women.

In an additional piece, Ms. Rajeswari addresses self-realisation in her study paper. In this instance, the character analysis was conducted by the researcher through a discussion of the “journey of Karuna from innocence to experience”, or how the character “Karura” evolved into a contemporary lady (S. Rajeswari, p. 81), the readers learned about the challenges and changes she experienced be linked to the other research papers mentioned above, as it also discusses a female character. Rajender Kumar, in his research paper, explores the psychological analysis of the same novel while working on the same theme as in the above-mentioned research articles, rebelliousness. Themes of adulthood, extramarital affairs, crises, and transition are covered here. Through them all, this research investigates notes that the main characters of Shobha De have been portrayed as "rebels" who appear to destroy the robust Indian social structure and usher in a period of promiscuity and sexual depravity. This shift is from modesty and reluctance to free expression and assertiveness (Kumar 5). Basically, the researcher discusses the revolts and rebellions among the female characters in Shobha De's novel. This article also has some similarities with the above-mentioned articles, as it also talks about a female character, while giving the readers an insight into the eroticism and rebelliousness in them.

Rao & Sridevi, in their article, discuss the foolishness and conceit of women in contemporary culture who defy convention, transcend long-standing, powerful barriers, and establish their own lives (Rao and Sridevi, p. 336). In this article, the researchers explore women who came out of their shells and became independent, examining the effects and aftereffects of individual independence and how they act in particular situations. It also discusses the way they carry themselves in society. The researcher suggested that modern women's roles differ from those of traditional women, who are more domestic workers, and then gives examples of Shobha De's characters as he portrays them. They also discuss the changing norms and values of the modern woman in the world; they state that “self-assertion, self-respect, and self-recognition seem to have become the marks of the evolving woman.” (Rao and Sridevi, p. 338). This implies that modern women will do anything to keep their masked personalities perfect; no set of rules binds them. These women do what they want to maintain their social mask.

It is seen that modern women have developed the trait of jealousy as an aftereffect of the social mask, which pushes them to do better and work harder to maintain it. Along with this, researchers also state that “the modern woman may sacrifice herself for the happiness and well-being of the family, but not her individuality and space” (Rao and Sridevi, p. 342), explaining the limits of living their lives. For doing so, they sometimes destroy their own happiness, as it is said in the conclusion of the article, “Creation is always difficult, but destruction is very easy” (Rao and Sridevi 344), showing that the excess of everything is bad. The link of similarity is the same here. However, this article is also somewhat linked to the primary research, as the term “modern women” is discussed in detail, which will further support the primary research.

Dina Ligaga also discusses socialite women, but on the Kenyan side, she focuses on women's “self-representation” in patriarchal society. More clearly, she discusses the elements of “Post feminism, Neoliberalism and Femininity” in her article, where women's bodies are recognised, and their importance acknowledged in public discourse, as well as a change in how these bodies are articulated in public (Ligaga, 2020, p. 122). She also discusses the empowerment of women in their area and how they represent themselves. Hee-Hyu Heidi Park discusses cultural hybridity, including herself as an example of a hybrid

individual. She says she lives in the United States and is Korean, so she is a hybrid (Heidi Park 1), and then further discusses the experience an individual faces, explaining the term cultural hybridity.

Lastly, Rajeswari & Gejeswari (2015) discuss human existence in the novel and the relationships among the characters. Along with all of this, male and female dominance are also discussed in the respective articles. The primary focus of this article is on the relationships of different individuals, and she concludes by saying, “Their pseudo-feelings keep them bound together, but they find chances to flirt with newly selected companions quite ignorant of each other” (p. 245). By going through all those articles, one thing is clear: they discuss women, which may be because the novel is closely related to the feminist perspective. The research gaps this study seeks to address are the novel through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha’s cultural hybridity. It further examines a character named “Karuna” and how she changed her behaviour and character to become a “new woman” of society, how she survived with the cultural differences and how it all shaped her into what she became in the end. This character analysis study will help open a new research dimension for this novel.

## **METHOD AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This research is a qualitative content analysis of the novel’s characters. The study employs both latent and manifest content analysis techniques to ensure precision. The research paper examines Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* in detail through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity. Since the theory addresses the hybridity of cultures in society, it will deepen our understanding of the novel’s realities. The novel and the theory that will be applied to it will be the main subjects of this investigation. A variety of scholarly articles and research projects support this study. Later, the findings of this research will be used to draw an insightful discussion and its conclusion. The research philosophy employed in this study is interpretivism, which explores individual interpretations and unique viewpoints. The individuals draw on their experiences, apply qualitative methods, adopt a contextual understanding, and highlight a holistic approach to clarify the intricate tapestry of human analysis within the given sociocultural context.

Cultural hybridity theory by Homi K. Bhabha, in which he discusses cultural identities, hybridity, and mimicry. According to Bhabha, cultural hybridity creates a space known as “third space,” and the productive capacities of this third space must have a colonial or postcolonial origin (Bhabha, 1994). It is something beyond “binary opposition”; it combines elements from different cultures and becomes a space. The characters in Shobha De’s novel entered this third space, especially the women, who serve as the basis for this research. The primary reason is that the characters experience hybridity through the amalgamation of Indian and Western cultures—the space where different cultures blend. One is from their motherland, while the other is the one they somehow adapted to, or, as we can say, want to be like. This thing here shows the element of mimicry in them, too. To adequately justify this research paper, we use one major character, Karura, who is a central figure in the novel, and the description below further supports our findings. Cultural identity is an element of Homi K. Bhabha’s cultural hybridity theory, which emphasises the role of cultural identities in shaping individuals through colonialism and power relations (Bhabha, 1994).

Hybridity is another element of the cultural hybridity theory, in which cultural production is most productive where it is most uncertain. Here, the primary focus is on how identities are mixed or blended and form a new thing or new aspect of a culture, known as the “third space”, according to Bhabha. Cultural identities are always in flux and constantly being redefined. After getting a taste of hybridity, she began looking at his homeland through an entirely new lens. In this regard, Bhabha argues that mimicry poses a threat because of its dual vision, which exposes the ambivalence of colonial discourse and undermines its authority. He further notes that “the effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound



and disturbing” (Bhabha, 1994), as excessive mimicry may erode an individual’s original essence. Nevertheless, mimicry also plays a formative role in shaping identity, as illustrated by Karuna, who consciously transforms herself into the person she desires to become. Although this transformation leads to familial tensions—particularly concerning her father’s acceptance—she ultimately succeeds in asserting her chosen identity. We might conclude that Karuna was already lured to an affluent, cosmopolitan lifestyle if we discuss how cultural hybridity helped her become a contemporary lady and the adjustments she encountered along the way. “She was a wealthy Playboy’s wife and a well-known socialite.” (De, 2007) Here, she found herself drawn to the contemporary woman in society, often called a “new woman.” This phrase characterises “women as autonomous, mentally sharp, and physically skilled, and able to work, study, and socialise on a par with men.” (Rudnick). She is attracted to individuals, specifically females, who can support themselves and are the bosses of their own lives. They became independent and started to earn to support themselves financially, too. In another place, she said, “Her fragrance washed over me, and it was then that I realised that the rich even smelled different.” (De, 2007) By seeing the easy-looking, luxurious lifestyle of the elite class, her mindset begins to change, proving that cosmopolitan lifestyles and cultural differences can shift an individual’s mindset, especially a woman in the selected novel.

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

Shabha De’s (2007) female characters are attracted to each other, as said by a character in the novel: In actuality, they were excessively flawless, or perhaps I was envious. When words failed her, she would wave her small-wristed arms around to demonstrate a point, and I would gaze wide-eyed at those finely sculpted and buffed points. (De, 2007). The quote shows how envious Karuna is of that glamorous lifestyle; she is attracted to everything, no matter whether it is clothes, perfumes, jeweler, or cars. It glided up like a gigantic swan, negotiating its way past pedestrians, taxis, handcart pullers, and local buses. It shows that she is attracted to a symbol of high-class society. She is drawn to glamour, which leads to socialite evenings, or, in other words, high-class parties. However, in the background of South Asian culture, socialite evenings and hybrid cultures are hard to deal with. She said, I knew I had finally found my city when we got off the dirty train and onto the slushy platform at Bombay Central (De, 2007), indicating the bias developing in her due to hybridity. The next element is mimicry, which is “a desire that, through the repetition of partial presence, which is the basis of mimicry, articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial, and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority.” (Bhabha, 1994, p.126). So, in short, we can say that the act of repeating or overemphasising aspects of another culture or cultures is mimicry. It is a form of hybridity, as we copy elements from other cultures we like, which Bhabha sees as positive. In the novel, we see many examples of mimicry; the most common is adopting a cosmopolitan lifestyle and socialising while trying to belong to the upper, luxurious class. Well, the whole novel is about a woman named “Karuna”, who was a middle-class lady and got lucky by getting fame and success. This completely changed her life, and she became a socialite. She left her dissatisfying old class for a better one and completely changed her life while mimicking the higher class. She mimics the other culture by adopting its norms and values, thereby following Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, which emphasises flawed imitation (Bhabha, 1994). This suggests that the representation of another culture can also fall under the same umbrella. For a South Asian housewife, it was hard for her to keep the peace between her dreams and her family. This was completely different from the little modelling jobs I had previously done for fun, and Father had been so upset about them (De, 2007). She wanted to be like a socialite who enjoys her life, but in a South Asian household, modelling and similar things are not considered good jobs, so the Asian parental touch is shown. Here, the cultures clash with each other, as the Asian culture, or, to be specific, the traditional Indian culture, clashes with the Western culture. In the West, individuals are portrayed as strong and independent, which significantly shapes characters, whether knowingly or unknowingly. She faced a cultural clash here: she wanted to do something she liked, but her religious values and family norms were trying to stop her. Father did not often talk to us personally. Everything he wanted to say was always

directed via Mother, unless it was necessary to reprimand us for our offences. Punishment was then immediate and straightforward (De, 2007). The given statement suggests that Karuna's family resembles a typical Asian patriarchal household where parents are believed to know what is best for their children. While this belief often holds, it does not apply in every case. The novel also foregrounds the justification adults offer for their authority by asserting that whatever he did to us was done in the belief that he was bringing us up right (De 2007). Karuna admits that she consciously explains Anjali to her mother while omitting details she knows would worry her. She further acknowledges that she has consistently held that her mother is psychic without fully realizing it and that she carefully describes Anjali while avoiding areas that might alarm her. This admission reveals that she is not entirely different from her mother and that a deeply rooted tripartite Asian mindset continues to shape her identity over the long term.

When Karuna reflects that in the past she yearned to be part of the bright and beautiful set that so many girls in school effortlessly belonged to (De, 2007) she refers to a phase marked by simpler desires and emotional innocence before her immersion in socialite evenings. After being introduced to a cosmopolitan lifestyle and professional success, her mindset changes so profoundly that these modest experiences no longer serve as her happy place. This shift highlights how socialite culture reshapes her priorities and distances her from the small pleasures that once defined her sense of belonging.

The individual is greatly affected by the hybrid culture because they have to live between two cultures. So, the traits of both cultures will be in him, willingly or unwillingly. Karuna, the protagonist and modern woman, is deeply affected by cultural hybridity and modifies herself to become the person she ultimately becomes. At the start of the novel, she shares that she was born in a village, and by the end, she is a member of high society. To achieve such a significant gap, she became the modern new woman of society, a figure that emerged from cultural hybridity. As for the characters in the novel, they survived. The women in the novel had the potential to do so, and when they got the chance, they did. Then nothing else matters to them except their self-respect and social status. It is supported by Bhabha's hybridity theory, which focuses on power imbalances, cultural clashes, and social injustice and their impact on identity. In conclusion, we can say that after a taste of the glamorous lifestyles, she completely changed her mind and her lifestyle. So, we can say that cultural hybridity and socialite evenings do affect an individual's mind and lifestyle, especially females. They gained the freedom they had longed for, and their character evolved into a new, bolder, and more independent one. So, it can be said that cultural hybridity does affect an individual. The cultures and traditions of India are also discussed here, as the novel is set in South Asia and explores the suppressed and married women of that society. So being a socialite broadens their minds, especially women's minds, to a great extent. It gives their interest a new spark, as the protagonist of the novel "Karuna" does.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Socialite Evenings* (2007) reflects the international evolution of urban living and social dynamics. It highlights how cultural hybridity significantly shapes the lives of modern or new women. The most prominent illustration of this dynamic is the protagonist, Karuna, whose lifestyle undergoes a marked transformation and upward shift. Through the possibilities of the "third space," Karuna selectively inherits elements from both her native and Western cultures. This cultural negotiation enables her emergence as a modern woman—self-directed, autonomous, and resistant to social constraints. It also probes their mindsets, as when females finally come out of their shells, they realise things that they did not before. Mostly, it is the feeling of having control over their lives. This helps them grow mentally even more. Having control over your own life is a central theme of the novel, necessary for an individual's self-growth. As we know, the selected novel is set in South Asia, specifically India. It concludes that the lifestyles of individuals in hybrid cultures give rise to new identities, and it examines how cultural hybridity, along with the character's survival, has always been the prime focus. It argues that an individual is deeply affected by

cultural hybridity, as they are divided between two lives shaped by different cultures, norms, and identities. “Karona”, the modern woman, is deeply affected by cultural hybridity, as she transforms herself into a different person. So, Bhabha’s hybridity analysis of Karona’s character leads to a debate about power imbalances, cultural clashes, social injustice, and their impact on identity. The limitation of this research is that it deals with the character of the “Karuna”, so other characters are free for future researchers to do their study. As this study is a qualitative content analysis, other types of methods can also be used as a lens to explore this particular area of research, such as a narrative study.

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