



IMPACT FACTOR
6.10

ISSN 2229-4406

UGC Approved International Registered & Recognized
Research Journal Related to Higher Education for all Subjects

UNIVERSAL RESEARCH ANALYSIS

UGC APPROVED & PEER REVIEWED RESEARCH JOURNAL

Issue - XXI, Vol. VII
Year - XI (Half Yearly)
Sept. 2020 To Feb. 2021

Editorial Office :
'Gyandev-Parvati',
R-9/139/6-A-1,
Near Vishal School,
LIC Colony,
Pragati Nagar, Latur
Dist. Latur - 413531.
(Maharashtra), India.

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Publisher :
Jyotichandra Publication
Latur, Dist. Latur - 413531. (MS)

Price : ₹ 200/-

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3

Modern and Urban Families in Shobha De's Spouse

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Research Paper - English

Shobha De's Spouse is a truth about the marriage. De dedicates her spouse to herself and to her husband. In fact she dedicates it to all spouses, who aspire to lead a happy and successful married life. The entire prose work has its own novelty. It gives hints, suggestions and advises to the spouses who are engaged in the wedlock. The present work, in fact leads the readers to contemplate over the question, 'why the necessity has occurred to advise the spouses for their successful and happy marriages?' As a feminist, De ponders over the marriages and families of modern and urban India. She observes that in the modern age, where the new woman has emerged challenging the old traditions, problems, ahead of her, has developed a challenging attitude; she is ready to walk with hand in hand along with her husband. Her liberation, her freedom, her growing economic independence, her full confidence, has lead to her independent thinking. On one hand her independent thinking has become a boon for her and on the other a bane. An educated woman can help her life mate, her husband in decision making. But men, who are habituated to impose their opinions on their wives, cannot tolerate it. As a result the decision making has become a issue in many urban families. In fact, De focuses her attention on educated, high and socialite families in urban areas, where the impact of western culture is prevailing. Under such circumstances, the institution of marriage is in danger, just not only in India but all over the world.

Having observed the extinction of perfect marriages in the modern and urban Indian society, the writer feels that a Perfect marriage consists of a perfect spouse.



"Marriage is what you make of it"(1) The writer advises couples to self examine. If a spouse wants to make his or her marriage a happiest one on the earth, he or she is supposed to get rid of certain bad habits, qualities which their spouse doesn't like. Selfish or Selfishness is an awful word in the unsuccessful marriages. "Selfish, Self-focused, Self Centered, Self- Obsessed, Self-absorbed, self, self, self."(8). If this four letter word-'self' is too much in marriage, it doesn't work. According to Shobha De, Selfishness is an awful and unpleasant word. She admits that selfishness leads to the destruction of harmonious relations of a wife and husband. Hence the writer advises readers to examine one's self, if at all one wants a happy marriage. If it is excess in one, it is better to reduce it and it may prove a windfall to the wife and husband.

Shobha De holds very strong opinion about Indian men or husbands. She believes that the men who are selfish possess very sturdy opinions on their wives and their appearance. "They have strong opinions on all subjects, including how their wives should look. (p.23) In the male-oriented society like India, men's feelings and opinions are predominant than women. Women's feelings are secondary and are considered less important in the Indian Society. Women are not supposed to hold any opinion on their husbands. They are supposed to accept husband with their vices without any protest. But, now the situation of Indian wives has changed. In the modern and urban society, women also hold their own opinion and feeling. They also exhibit their selfish motives and attitude. They do not hesitate to breakup their relation as wife and husband. So it is the need of the day to self-examine, if at all one wants marriage a blissful one, the ego of a spouse should not disturb one's relation as a wife & husband.

In India, quite a few modern and urban families are on the verge of breakup. There are several reasons for the disintegration of families and for the separation of wife and husband. Lack of honesty is one of the reasons for the inharmonious relations between wife and husband. Honesty, for Shobha De is very important in perfect marriages and it is the best, most trusting one. "Make a way for 'honesty' and not for hypocrisy". (6) As a member of a family, we laugh at jokes that aren't funny. We pretend to be very nice to in-laws when we hate them. We tolerate friends we cannot stand, but we don't get caught; According to Shobha De, Hypocrisy is a dangerous word. It hurts



the marriage, when goes out of control. Hence both wife and husbands must be true about their feelings. She also admits that at times, hypocrisy also works in marriages in changing the mood of a spouse. In that case if a bit of hypocrisy works, where is the harm in using it? But only harmless hypocrisy is tolerable. Manipulative hypocrisy is not good. Hence, the author believes that honesty workouts in a happy family rather than hypocrisy.

Another reason for the breakup of marriages is the lack of healthy communication between wife and husband. The writer considers that Healthy communication also makes a positive approach towards a perfect marriage. For her, healthy communication needs clarity and honesty. It is also a habit worth cultivating. "Many marriages fail in this very basic practice, till one day both partners wake up to discover they've actually got out of the habit of speaking freely to each other. Problems frequently begin at this very elementary level".(p 16) In many cases, women feel shy to discuss the things with their husband and expect their husband to understand them and their feelings. "Women fail to speak openly with their husbands. Without saying anything to her husband, how can a husband know his wife's mind? He does not possess any inbuilt Intuition. Partners are not mind-readers-spell out your requirements. A wall of silence between partners leads to 'deadness'. So be aware. Share your feelings. (33) The writer advises the spouses to cultivate the habit of healthy communication.

Having experienced the bitter experiences in her first marriage, the writer strongly believes that positive thinking and love are essential for a happy marriage. Shobha De gives an example of her own life. She did the same thing, a mistake in her first marriage. She admits that her expectations with her spouse didn't match and her head strong nature, impatience leads to her disintegration of her first marriage. However she admits that her life in the marriage was the toughest one. "I was entirely alone and quite broke. But my spirit remained strong, as I Salvaged what I could and moved on ".(72) De believes that positive approach is essential between husband and wife. She suggests couples to have a positive approach and a understanding in marriage life. "Think positive; repair the cracks as marriage counselors generally advise. A house that breeds 'love' can be a happy home. If hatred is there, the marriage becomes foul".(70).

In India modern and urban families are after money. Peacefulness and



satisfaction are far away from their lives. And the writer believes that money is a delicate subject in the marriage. She believes that urban marriages are going through a major revolution based on just this one aspect of marriage-money. Men handle the money matters. They control the entire family. If non-working wife spends money-they agree about her extra expenditures. Wives with zero personal income are the worst sufferers, having to put up with humiliation at times. On the other hand the wives from rich background play power game with husband and even in-laws. They manipulate money matters. They spend their husband's income lavishly without caring for her in- laws & husbands needs. In both the cases, marriages flounder on account of misunderstandings or mistrust over money matters. "Self-worth healthy self worth is the best protection against childish power games. If you know your strengths and care generously recognize the strengths of your partners. The marriage can grow in positive, enriching way. Husband & wife argue to fop up the talk in the wife's car".(72) At times they argue about the money matters and come to a decision to distribute the account pay.If they are unsatisfactory in money matters, they breakup. Money is everything in modern marriages.

The concept of joint families is extinguishing and the nuclear families are flourishing in the so- called modern and urban India. The joint-family system and life isn't easy. But it's not at all that terrible, either, but still it is good to maintain good relations. Daughter-in-laws should play an active role in maintaining good relation. If anyone wants to maintain it, she /he needs to 'Sacrifice' her/his pleasures to certain extent. They need to practice a tough exercise to keep themselves happy and their in-laws too. The writer suggests daughter in-laws to treat in-laws like parents, not like in-laws. Similarly, she advises that in-laws must care their daughter-in-law as daughter, a dearest daughter. But daughter in-laws should not expect total freedom from in- laws. "I want total freedom to live, dress and eat as I please".(228) Mutual understanding is very essential joint family. De advises her readers, especially the couple to help each other when one undergoes stress & strain. Understanding the problems, discussing and sharing the problems is equally important in a perfect marriage. 'Spouse' expects 'soothing words' from her partner and he/she supposed to extend co-operation in every walk of life. Above all, couples need to





do is to follow the formula of three T'S. TTT rule-Time, Tolerance and Tenderness. She says people need all three in abundance to make their marriage an ideal one. She concludes her novel with the quote from Hindu Sanskaras on marriage, in which a husband prays to the goddess Saraswati, to protect marriage: " Sarasvati, promote this undertaking, O gracious one, O Bountiful one, thou who will sing first of all that is; in whom what is; has been born; in whom this world dwells--that song I will sing today, which will be the highest glory of women".(283) De recommends to maintain tolerance, understanding, positive thinking, honesty and healthy communication are essential for happy marriages.

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