



Expectations versus Reality in Shobha De's Second Thoughts

NILAM P. CHAUHAN

Abstract:

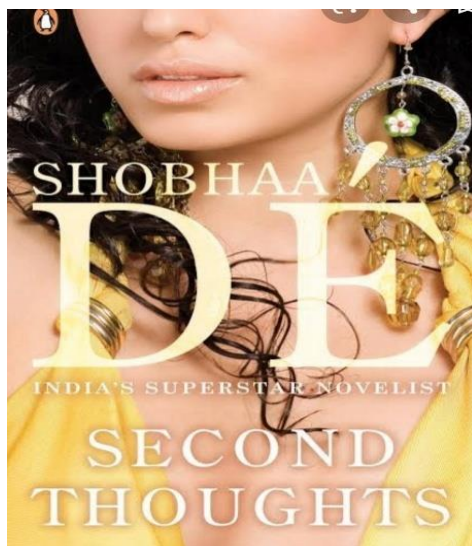
Shobha De, the prominent writer of Indian English fiction, in her novel Second Thoughts describes the predicament of women through her protagonist Maya, who is forced to suffer silently the rigid social norms which govern by the male-dominated Indian society. Maya is totally different from De's other protagonist. She has a dual personality, on one side she is very traditional and doing things that her parents said and on the other side, she wants to live her life happily without any traditional and social norms. When her marriage makes her aware of the male-dominated world and reality, she starts living her life by her way and indulges in the love affair with Nikhil. Maya, in her world, tries to avoid all the traditions and her marriage with Ranjan. Later on when she came to know about Nikhil's fake love she silently suffered and came back to her husband Ranjan and accepts the reality.

Keywords: *Shobha De, Second Thoughts, reality, dreams, male domination, New women, traditional women*

1. Introduction

Shobha De-Rajyadhyaksh was born in Satara, a small district in Maharashtra, in 1948 in a traditional Maharashtrian family. She began her career in journalism in 1970 in the course of which she founded and edited three popular magazines: *Stardust*, *Society* and *Celebrity* and was consulting editor to *Sunday* and *Megacity*. She earned both name and fame while working as a freelance writer and columnist for several leading newspapers and magazines.

Shobha De is one of the well-known Indian English female novelists. Her works generally start with the letter 'S'. She wrote her first novel the best-selling *Socialite Evenings* and in 1990 she published *Starry Nights*. Her other works are *Sisters*, *Strange Obsessions*, *Sultry Days*, *Snapshots*, *Second Thoughts*, *Uncertain Liaisons*, *shooting from the Hip: Selected Writings*, *Surviving Men*, *Selective Memory*, *Small Betrayals*, *Speed Post*, *Spouse* and *Super India*.



Second Thoughts, the seventh novel of Shobha De, is different from her earlier novels, a bittersweet love story of nineties. The high society, which was the familiar background of Shobha De's writing, has been replaced by middle-class society.

Maya, a young and pretty girl, dreams of a wonderful life. She wishes to convert her dull and middle-class home into the whirl of Bombay, where she moves after her marriage. She accepts Ranjan, a hard-working, handsome and ambitious boy, for marriage as he had all glamour of an American educated and wealthy family background. But after marriage she finds herself trapped in a family whom she discovers as rigidly conservative, indifferent to her desire and not respecting her feelings. Ranjan is totally different from the boy of her desires and dreams. She starts feeling lonely and having second thought of fulfilling her desires by falling in a love affair with Nikhil, her young college going neighbour.

The idealized version of marriage is based on mutual reciprocation and equality. The successful marriage provides fulfilment and satisfaction to both the husband and wife in their marital life. However, in a male-dominated society, marriage provides the man with unquestionable power to exert over his wife, which results in enslaving and subduing the woman, thereby severing the wife off her individuality.

Once the marriage ceremony is over, Maya's aspirations are shattered by her unsympathetic husband Ranjan. Though an American educated and successfully working in a bank, Ranjan is still a conservative-minded person.

Ranjan fails to comprehend Maya as an individual personality, as he never allowed her to live her life by herself. He always imposed his dominant nature and behaviour as her husband. Maya is like a caged bird at her sasural who was under restrictions not to use installed facilities of her house. Ranjan is an egoist who always tries to establish his superiority over Maya by forcefully denying her the freedom and self-respect of her as a human being.

Naturally, because of this dominated atmosphere, she feels worthless and she loses her self-confidence and interest towards life. Maya feels that marriage in a wrong family makes women aimless. Maya feels and thinks to relieve herself from this entire rigid and stubborn atmosphere and tries to become rebellious without expressing her views to Ranjan. She finds her way by indulging herself with Nikhil and tries to get happiness towards that affair. She imagined that she can break all the social norms and break this marriage but in reality, she is forced to remain bound by the societal concept of marriage.

Maya is constantly depressed because of her loneliness. There is no one in Bombay with whom she can share her troubles or views. She feels useless in Bombay and wants to share her problems but no one is there. One day after seeing the banana selling women, she feels that "How lucky she was to be outside. In the midst of people earning for herself and nurturing other's life." (De 87) She was fed up by the dominant and ego-centric husband. She wanted to earn freedom for herself. How her dreams for Bombay make her feel that instead of this I was OK as Miss Maya, however her desires about marriage like other girls give her loneliness and bitter life. She feels depressed and wants to leave this life.

Depressed and lonely Maya wanted meaningful and respect as a person in her life. She now started taking interest in her young neighbour Nikhil. Maya reaches to such a critical condition that she get involved in sexual relationship with Nikhil. She remembered his way of talking, his caring nature towards her. Because of Nikhil's attention, she starts loving herself, taking care of her appearance, feeling her existence, etc. Maya feels unsatisfied in her emotions and bodily pleasures. She decides to enter into a liaison with Nikhil. On her choice, Sonia Ningthoujam observes, "Maya's frustration and her rebellious nature cannot allow her to take her husband's indifference lying down. Maya decides to seek the fulfilment of her dreams elsewhere, however, sinful it might be." (Ningthoujam 40).

Maya was very innocently living in the world of her dreams. She thought that Nikhil, as an ideal lover, will take her away from this male dominated family into the world of her dreams. When he comes into her life, he brings new joy and happiness to her towards life. Once again, she dreams of that life which she dreamt off before marriage. All the desires are regenerated in the expectations of Nikhil's love. She wants to explore more and more places of Mumbai with him that she thought to explore with Ranjan. She wants to live like a free bird in Bombay. With Ranjan she has seen only his house in Bombay. She desire to explore Bombay with Nikhil and wants to wander like a free bird. She is in search of new avenues in Bombay. But Nikhil was the experienced Bombayite, who exploited innocent Maya by his shrewdness. In reality Shobha De describes such shrewd type of people through the character of Nikhil

and shows us the real nature of men. Nikhil knows that he neither can continue this romance with married woman nor can he take her home. Hence, he accepts the girl whom his mother has selected for marriage. The reality comes in front of Maya through his mother who informs that he is going to get married. This breaks Maya's all illusion about her pure love for Nikhil. Once again Maya's dreams break down. Nikhil was the perfect opportunist. Shobha de has brilliantly described the reality of women's life through the character of Ranjan and Nikhil. How girls are dreaming for beautiful marriage life but they face the bitter reality when they get married and when they try to enjoy and live their life by their own ways they get exploited by Nikhil like men. Maya is unable to maintain the balance between the reality of her husband and the dreamy world of Nikhil. The women protagonist of Shobha De are "bewildered when the existential absurdity of life is unmasked before them, when they face loneliness and lack of communication and communality and are finally brought to mental crises when masculine and institutional pressures are added to exacerbate them further." (Shanta vi) Maya is in such a condition when left by Nikhil.

Now Maya is in grief, her dreams broke very abruptly and she is to face the harsh reality of life. She was in shock. Not that she was not aware about Nikhil's other affairs with housewives, his diary was full with records about the travel schedules and he is always hooked with the bored wife. He was taking the advantage of lonely ladies and Maya was one of them for him. Even after facing such things Maya is not strong-willed and lacks the courage to step out of her meaningless tradition-bound marriage with Ranjan. However, Maya is able to realize that "there is no escape route in a tightly organized tradition bound society." (De 31).

Shobha De's novels are the real depiction of an urban life, as they deal with the contemporary issues. With this reference, *Second Thoughts* is the realistic example of a male dominated and patriarchal society in which even today girls can only live-in reality, they can't live by their dreams. They have to leave their dream. It shows the psyche of the traditional Indian men and women. They can claim that they are Modern and 21st century people but they are still living in age-old tradition and norms. In the institution of marriage still the men are the master and a woman has to abide by his whims and fancies whether she likes it or not.

Maya's marriage with Ranjan was not as desirable as she wanted and then she moved to Nikhil to fulfil her dreams and try to live her dream. Later on, she comes to know the reality of Nikhil and she accepts Ranjan again and rejoins him as he is. Thus, we can say that Maya is the character who depicts the reality of many Indian girl.

In conclusion we can assert that the Indian woman does not have the privilege of dreaming, as they are to face the harsh reality of the patriarchal societal males like Ranjan and Nikhil. Maya shares her fate with Laura Wingfield of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* wherein a woman resides in a dream world of glass menagerie but the entry of characters like Ranjan, Nikhil and Jim O'Connor shatter and destroys the beautiful feminine dreams of Maya and Laura. In her step to relive her dreams and be with Nikhil, Maya is a new woman but when she is deceived, she does not dare to dream the third time and accept the domination of her unloving husband Ranjan like a traditional woman. Thus, *Second Thoughts* presents the cultural fusion of modernity and tradition in the female characters like Maya. Maya, then, is an epitome of the fusion of new woman and a traditional woman, one who hinges on the expectations of a modern life against the harsh reality of the traditional patriarchal society.

References

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