

# Representation of Women's Real Life vs Inner Feeling in Shobha De's *Second Thoughts*

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## Abstract

*The paper is attempted to analyze traditional woman's life between reality and inner thought process in Shobha De's *Second Thoughts*, the novel is about an Indian girl, Maya who is victimized as silent sufferer through matrimonial relationship. This novel also describes the predicament of women by the protagonist Maya who is forced to suffer silently in rigid social like male-domination. The inner feeling and complex trauma are realistically depicted. Moreover, Maya is a unique of Shobha De's other protagonist. One way 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. After marriage she realizes consequences of male dominated world and reality and so 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. When she came to know about Nikhil's fake love, she accepted the pain and again joins with Ranjan.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Tradition, Indian Society, Suffering, Marriage, Reality, Feeling.

In Shobha De's *Second Thoughts*, Maya does not subscribe to her mother's traditional and stereotyped views and she claims that she is not fair at all. She says that, by her mother's standards, she is destined to live a condemned life. In her mind Maya is quite satisfied with how she looks as a high-spirited, energetic, bouncy young girl ready to meet life's several challenges head on. As both approach the Malik house, Maya's mother feels nerves whereas Maya is carefree.

Ranjan fails to comprehend Maya as an individual personality, and never allows to live her life according to her desire. He always imposed his dominant nature and behaviour on her, she was treated like a caged bird, and was under restrictions not to use installed facilities at home. Maya feels that marriage makes women aimless and she wants to relieve herself from this entire rigid and male dominated 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. It clearly shows that the women are not ready to live monotonously and modern women wish to have their self-identity. In view of this Myles aptly describes:

In the course of her various interviews and conversations Shobha De has reiterated the independence of women without compromising

her role as a householder. Her novels are deeply rooted in this firm conviction of the novelist. She lays emphasis on proper education of women before she can step forward for a meaningful reaction and revolt against the parochial social system without being branded as a rebel. Revolt is creative whereas rebellion is destructive. De's women characters show that educated and enlightened ones do not surrender to social pressures meekly rather they react against their husband's hypocrisy without compromising their family lives while women who are illiterate and dependent submit to the subordination of husbands. (105)

Maya married and settled in Bombay, longs to go out with her husband Ranjan to discover Bombay and wants to adopt her into city culture. But her husband has different ideas, Ranjan has no intention of allowing her to take up a job, and exaggerates the difficulty involved in getting a job in Bombay and what is worse in the city. Ranjan objects to Maya conversing with the mop-vendor and sees the spectre of his robbing and raping her. When she says she is lonely, he flies into a rage and bemoans his married lot. Above all she resents his frequent use of the word "nonsense", which is a horrible word of insult in Calcutta. Relevant to this, G.D.Barche, says:

*Maya realizes that hers was a mis-marriage. Ranjan had married her either to satisfy his mother or something within him, and she married him to get away from Calcutta and a family with whom she didn't "really feel a sense of belonging" ...She also feels that they were locked together in a relationship that did not satisfy either of them. Ranjan longs to be on his own leading the life of 'a promising bank executive' and she longs for the 'perfect romantic companion.' So neither of them is 'cool' but the areas of their warmth are different. Hence, it can be said that 'two uncool people stuck together in unholy matrimony.'* (274)

Similarly, Parmar also talks about Maya's married life:

*'Second Thoughts' presents the pathetic plight of a newly wedded middle class urban woman who suffers out of no fault of her own. And when the suffering is beyond her endurance, she violates general and accepted norms to end her suffering and to attach a new meaning to her meaningless married life.* (230)

Later, Maya feels fascinated by the young man Nikhil, their neighbour's college-going son. He does not fancy calling her "didi" as his mother wants him to. She allows him to call her by her name. His nonchalance is a challenge to her but she's flattered because he notices her and is interested in her.

Maya is so bored and frustrated that she feels irresistibly attracted to Nikhil and she wonders long and hard about why it is so. While at her morning chores, Maya wonders how Nikhil spends his day. One evening Nikhil gives a tape containing songs written, set to music and sung by him. He wants to come in and listen to it with her. Maya takes the tape saying that she will listen to it later. Nikhil mentions a particular song and goes away. Ranjan arrives to see Maya standing transfixed at her door. Maya hides the tape in a kitchen drawer. Since the next day is Saturday, in order to get rid of Ranjan's for some hours so as to be able to listen to Nikhil's tape, Maya proposes to cook something for his mother. Ranjan is delighted and proposes to invite his mother over for the day. When Maya suggests that he take the dish to his mother, he says that he has a lot of paperwork and cannot leave the home. So Maya is fated to wait whole days to listen to Nikhil's song. Nikhil and Maya developed their relationship after knowing their relationship, Ranjan delivers a cautionary lecture to Maya as:

*That fellow is far too cocky. No guidance. I've noticed his mother. Slovenly woman with hairy arms. Imagine—hairy arms and she is a beautician. What does that boy do? Has he even finished school? I doubt it. I wouldn't employ him as even a doorman in my company. You should feel ashamed of yourself for hobnobbing with trash like him. If your mother is told about this incident, she'll be shocked, very shocked. I just hope my mother keeps quite about it.* (ST 82-83)

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.” (ST 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.

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 desires 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.

Shobha De describes the reality through shrewd type of character like Nikhil and shows 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. 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 protagonists 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.

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. Rashmi and Singh present the patriarchal society:

*In this patriarchal society, man can think about his life without woman but a woman cannot do the same. What a wife can do when she is ignored and neglected for all her feelings. Some mutely endure this situation and spend their whole life in suffocated atmosphere... (219)*

In “*Depiction of Women in the Novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Shobha De: A Contrastive Study*,” Neelam Singh and Rashmi Gupta say that after marriage, Maya feels herself trapped in a neglected and passive life because of her husband’s conservative nature, superiority complex and his insensitivity to all her feelings and, due to lack of emotional and conjugal bliss from her husband, she goes against him and tries to seek happiness and fulfilment through Nikhil, but her dream world shatters again (221-222). They add, “Ultimately, she realizes how to survive the sultriness of Bombay along with sultriness of her marriage and she decides to dedicate herself for her household only, in the end of the novel (222). Rashmi and Singh say:

*Shobha De feels that the whole question of the position of females in India is so wonderfully confused that it is impossible to take anyone's stand on it. For what they deserve as an autonomous being, they never get. From their childhood, they are made to learn how to compromise with status of a second person. [...] And this perplexing situation compels them sometimes to take such step, which is a major deviation from the established traditional norms. Through experience they come to their real self. As Shobha De believes that the woman has to be aware of her identity as a human being and think for herself. Woman should be an independent identity by being aware of the choices open to her. (218)*

Similarly, Myles reveals about the complex human situation arising for the career woman:

*...Shobha De has successfully depicted the tension arising out of the failure of the Indian women in properly negotiating the conflicting situations emerging from the clash between conservatism and liberalization. The gender issue of male chauvinistic dominance, the non-acceptance of a liberated woman by the Indian society, the growing question of sexual, familial, and individual dilemma have been dexterously highlighted by Shobha De in Second Thoughts. She takes up the burning question of woman's freedom in contemporary India where the protagonist finds herself in a complex human situation aggravated by social, historical and cultural changes. A woman in the Indian context survives the spiritual claustrophobia by surrendering her "will" to the prevalent social norms. (103)*

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, it is understood that Maya is the character who depicts the reality of many Indian girl. 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. 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 face anything further and accepts 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 reality and inner feeling of a traditional woman who hinges on the expectations of a modern life against the harsh reality of the traditional patriarchal society.

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