

PREDICAMENT OF INDIAN WOMAN AND MARITAL DISCORD IN SHOBHA DE'S *SECOND THOUGHTS*

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Abstract

In Indian culture since time immemorial, the marriage is canonized and admired as the most spiritual institution. But in present scenario, this institution is abutting of breaking down. The novels of Shobha De divulge the spiritual and moral collapse of martial relations and marriage institution. The present paper focuses the hollowness of marriage system of India. It focuses on the female consciousness against male ego. The present paper discusses the psychic- cum-social complexities of man woman relations in the novels of Shobha De with special focus on her novel *Second Thoughts*.

Keywords: marriage, moral, institution, relations

Shobha De is a woman with a glamorous personality who keenly observes the upper-class neo-rich life of sophisticated cities, especially as in Mumbai. Her life story is the story of a 'new woman' of the post-independence India. Shobha De bears multitalented personality. She has many feathers on her cap - a supermodel, columnist, editor, journalist, celebrity, scriptwriter, social commentator, daughter, wife and mother. Her latest role is of fashion designer. But none the less she is one of the most popular Indian women writers in English. Almost all her books are well known and widely read because of her realistic projection of the image of the upper-class woman of modern India. She is a talented writer with extraordinary skills to argue the very sensitive aspects of human relationship in general and man-woman relationship in particular. Today she is one of most popular writers because of her tempestuous style. She emerged on the Indian literary scene in 1989 with her first novel '*Socialite Evening*'. From '*Socialite Evening*' (1989) to '*Shethji*' (2012), with eighteen books she undoubtedly evolved as a perceptive woman writer. She has given a new definition to the literary world through her bold and extremely unique style.

Shobha De, who has carved out a niche for herself in the magnum opus of literary dome because of the wide readership, has dealt with different themes in her creative works. The relation between man and woman is one of the cardinal themes that are exemplified perceptibly in her creative works. She discusses this theme in almost all of her novels in an objective mode. Human relationships form a predominant premise for her fictional endeavors. She dexterously presents the subtleties of the relationships. She writes with amazing ease in intelligible language,

and her novels are rich in content. It is with these traits she has become a popular storyteller. Believing in truthful unfolding of incidents and situations she narrates with abundance of openness.

Shobha De is one of the most significant feminist novelists of contemporary ideas. In her writings she investigates to comprehend the psyche of the contemporary woman along with her qualms and cares. She deals with the current issues associated to the marginalization and domination of women. She persuasively portrays in her novels the intimate side of life of the urban women. It is truth that at present everywhere the women is sufferer because of prevailing social norms. Being trapped within the established social norms and moral codes of the society, she forced to live a gloomy life. Women of urban society are of no exception. In fact, woman is born to be free just like a man but is persecuted and cowed by men all over in the patriarchal mores. The term 'man' generally divulges the whole human race, whereas 'woman' is not given justice. She is considered as 'the second sex', the subordinate sex. In this patriarchal society woman still does not given the equal status to man and is regarded as a second person. Also even educated woman is not allowed to pursue her career unless she accomplishes her household duties. For the sake of her identity she has to concentrate on her career along with home. This is one of the major issues behind the clash between modernity and tradition which has been depicted by the feminist novelists while talking about the women liberation. Shobha De very outstandingly explores the various ways where the women are subjected to the male domination only because of her concern towards the diverse facets of their lives. In almost all of her novels she discussed about the marginalization of women in the Indian society. Through her female protagonists, De portrays a vivid image of the disparity between men and women prevailing in the present society. She has lured the concentration of the readers towards the discrimination, commodification and exploitation of women. In this male dominated society, women are treated with double standards. Virginia Woolf comments on the status of women as "Imaginatively she is of the highest importance."¹

Though on one hand women are selecting research fields and other technical and scientific ventures but at same time they are soft targets of sexual exploitation. This is the true face of Indian society where the marginalization and suppression are the significant aspects of the life of women; as even in the current scenario Indian society is still a male dominated society. Women are still not having independent status and are expected to perform all domestic responsibilities. They are given subordinate position with limited privileges. Their main duty is to look after the house and to bring up the children. They are on full time duty without any leisure. However at each and every phase it is the woman only who is ill-treated and discriminated and given a secondary position. Simone de Beauvoir views "Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees...."²

In *Second Thoughts* Shobha De explores the hollowness of marriage system of India. It is an expression of female consciousness against male ego, the domineering mother-in-law, the obedient wife, public semblance and the social charade. Alka Saxena comments that the novel is the "realistic representation of the psyche of the traditional Indian men and women."³ The most important social issue discussed by Shobha De in this novel is treachery in the institution of marriage. Normally when a woman gets ready for marriage, she has her dreams regarding love and pleasure of life. But when she gets trapped in marriage, all her colorful dreams melt steadily. The condition becomes worst when there is a mismatch which always directs to deterioration in family life. The woman starts feeling loneliness and develops aloofness with her partner. It

creates disturbance and dislodgement in their relations. In this novel marital life of Ranjan and Maya disrupted due to this conjugal indifferences. Being a Bengali, Maya leads her life in a world of allurements and fantasy in Bombay (Mumbai) far from the realities of life. Later on she is unable to sustain the equilibrium between the reality and fantasy. Maya expects Ranjan to comprehend little of her desires. She loiters for Ranjan to respond to her biological needs, her demands and urges. But he fails to fulfill her needs, which makes her unhappy. She becomes sexually frustrated and leisurely estranged from her husband. With the result Maya finds haven in the company of Nikhil as she realizes that her emotional longings are fulfilled by him.

Maya the central protagonist of novel, as per the meaning of her name used to travel in the world of fantasy. But she fails to recognize that dreams never come true and unfortunately she is obligated by the conditions to accept her seclusion as her companion. As truly depicted, Maya was fascinated by Bombay but was taken aback when she sensed that Bombay smelt of desperation and deceit. Since beginning Ranjan seems to be dominating her. She is a graduate in textile designing. When her mother motivates about her wish to pursue her career, Ranjan rejects it. He announces that he is earning well and the duty of woman is only to look after the home. After marriage when Maya asks him for doing a job, he bursts: “In our families, the only sort of work ladies do is social work. Our relatives criticize us if you suddenly take up a job” (29). This incident is one of the examples of male dominance and crushing the talent of women in the novel.

When she reacts furiously that she has no one else to converse in the house, Ranjan suggests to her that there is television, music and cleaning the house in order to pass the time. This passive attitude of husband becomes intolerable to a wife especially in a country like India. He even does not give any liberty to Maya to enjoy her life in her own ways. Once when she says that she wants to attend a few pottery classes as she has much leisure, Ranjan replies: “Housewives don’t have extra time—there so much to be done around the home. Take Ma’s example, she is busy round the clock” (139). He keeps on reminding Maya about her duties as a wife and married woman. He is scarcely aware of her existence in his home. He never discusses anything with her. He never allows her to participate in decision making process. When she insists to participate in these affairs, he just refuses declaring that wife should look after the husband when he returns home; he engraves for a little peace in the house. She never senses invited or required in the bedroom as it always be a Ranjan’s room, while the kitchen is the place that belongs totally to her. This presents male bigotry and apathy, which force women to tolerate the year’s old reticence imposed on them.

Ranjan is too much devoted to his mother and in return she also adores him. The Indian husband has ‘mother fixation’ in order that he takes his wife only as an alternative of his mother. Maya feels that it is only in order to satisfy his mother he had married with her. He used to discuss each and every thing with his mother instead of Maya. He rebuffs to share even the single facet of his life with her. She doubts whether he assumes her his rival, or does not have adequate trust in her. Once she confronts to ask him and Ranjan answers devoid of taking his eyes off the T.V. screen: “Of course I trust you but my mother is my mother, I have known her longer than you. These things take time” (205). Beneath one roof they live like strangers. They are in the relationship which satisfies neither of them.

It is the necessity for the husband to take care of physical and psychological wants of his spouse. Unfortunately most of the husbands fail to fulfill the needs of their wives which develop ennui in her marital life. Ranjan is sexually incontinent. Even for a while he feels sexually aroused in the presence of his wife Maya. In order to conceal his impotency, he tries to establish

his supremacy in other ways. Once while she is in love making mood he solicits her to wait and utters: ‘I am not ready yet Maya... you will have to be patient. It is going to take time. I can’t. I just can’t.’ (53). On one more occurrence when Maya seek to caress him, he jumps back: ‘as though he had received an electric shock. He had lain trembling in bed for a long time, his breathing heavy, his eyes screwed shut. He asked her to “stop behaving like a cheap woman. A prostitute” (259). When Maya enquires Ranjan regarding is disinterest in sexual urges, he retorts angrily: “What’s your problem? You are beginning to sound like some sort of a nymphomaniac. Are you that sex-starved? Nothing else on your mind? How can sex being so important to anybody, I’ve never understood” (351).

The relationship of Maya and Ranjan is a failure not only at the sexual level but also at the level of their personalities and their compatibility. When the predicament of woman is unnoticed by her husband, she finds consolation from others. Nikhil’s entry in her life brings new meaning to her existence. Her dreams and wishes once again emerge and suddenly she views the dazzling rainbow extends across the sky. But Nikhil is very adroit in fishing up females. He is among those who wait for an opportunity to exploit the frustration of married women for attaining their carnal gratifications. Nikhil starts his moves slowly and flirts with Maya. Once seeing her in green sari, he comments: “You look like a beautiful garden today” (45). Then he offers her the cassette of his songs and asks her to listen the fourth song on side B. First she resists but later on knowing that the song is for her she agrees ‘to listen to it later... tomorrow’. On hearing the song Maya, who has been constantly humiliated and neglected, finds herself to be honoured and praised. She likes the song and has also conveyed her likings to Nikhil: “I love your song” (110). Hence Nikhil gets success in his effort. Nikhil encourages her to do something spontaneous in her life. He tells her to “stop pretending to be someone you want the world to believe you” (171). He persuades her to get real and act real. Once when Ranjan is away for business trip, she feels free and enjoyed the company of Nikhil. Nikhil takes her for outing. Through his soft, slow, skilful, well calculated measures he succeeds in carving a niche in Maya’s heart.

Nikhil’s efforts finally bear fruit when one morning he calls on Maya with flowers announcing his birthday. Then without giving her any time for thinking or reacting, he pulls her into his embrace. She feels to herself: “Every bit of me was suddenly alive to the feel of Nikhil’s lips, hands, arms, neck, chest, knees and legs. An unknown recklessness started to sweep over me” (268). She can feel him distinctly as she becomes a captive to Nikhil’s advances. This is what Maya wants from Ranjan. But women resort to extramarital relations when their carnal pleasures are completely neglected by their husbands. But Nikhil belongs to the new generation, who used to take advantage of aggravation and limitation of lonely ladies and Maya is the only adjunct to his unending list.

With the company of Nikhil Maya decides to leave her lifeless married life. But Nikhil was certainly not an alternative of Ranjan. Ten days later, she came to know about the engagement of Nikhil with a Delhi based girl, Anshu. She was stunned to know that she was used by Nikhil. Hence once again Maya’s dream- world traumatized. She has no option but to live in the muggy environment of arranged marriage. The romance and happiness in her life is seer and she remains alone eternally. Her snivel for true mate remains unheard. Also the nature of men has been explored in this novel. For Ranjan, Maya exists nowhere and for Nikhil she is only the entity of sensual enjoyment. Maya in order to flee from the tedious married life follows her own ways to attain her desires and dreams. Jaydipsinh Dodiya condemns the “hollowness and hypocrisy”⁴ of the institution of Indian marriage.

Maya has never been a disgraceful woman. She has always felt guilty for her companionship with Nikhil. She is the victim of miss- marriage. She got married to Ranjan in order to leave Calcutta while Ranjan married her only to please his mother. Hence they both were tied up in a relationship where they both were not satisfied. Ranjan failed to gratify her emotional and physical needs. Maya in search of these needs becomes the victim of well-planned tricks and efforts of Nikhil.

Now the question arises, who is to be blamed for the fall of Maya? Maya herself or Ranjan or Nikhil or Maya's her own desires or Ranjan's reserved and cold attitude for Maya? Opportunist Nikhil, for whom woman is just a piece of cake? Or our conventional, age-old institution of marriage that offers financial security, house to live and family to a woman at the cost of her individuality, identity and freedom? Sex is the base of marriage and sexual satisfaction is the basic requirement of couple. Shall Maya who was deprived of this be blamed for establishing illicit relationship with Nikhil? Today in 21st century although people are being progressed and prospered avariciously but in tradition of marriage, man is still the master, the lord while the woman is his full time slave. Ranjan never treated Maya as human being of flesh and blood having some desires apart from food and home. Maya never got emotional and physical love from Ranjan but she did get this from Nikhil. Nikhil was full of enthusiasm, frank and sensitive. He fascinated Maya through his compliments, remarks and appreciativeness. He taught Maya to love herself and to find out her own identity. Maya involved emotionally with Nikhil but he shrewdly took advantage of Maya's loneliness. Maya was left lonely forever as she had no way but to stay in the unwanted relation with Ranjan.

Through Maya, Shobha De tries to present the suffering, agony and silence of Indian women who accept marriage as their fate. Maya is just a symbol who wants to break her silence; she has to come back again in the muggy environment of marriage. Life is harsh and bitter reality that has to be suffered silently by a woman. Maya has no choice except to endure the seclusion in her life. She wanted to establish her own identity and tried to be hostile against the double standards of the society but failed to do so. This novel throws the light on the condition of Indian married woman who has been trapped and trodden between nature and custom. It projects not only the hollowness of Indian marriage but also the deception and insincerity in extra-marital relations which can never be an alternative to the marriage. The novel also depicts the psychology of men. Maya exists nowhere for Ranjan while for Nikhil she is just an opportunity to enjoy sex.

Shobha De describes marriage as "Marriage to me connotes commitments and surrender, merging with, blending, overlapping and combing. It is a symbolic relationship.⁵ But in the marriage of Maya and Ranjan, commitment and becoming one never exists. Maya tried hard to understand Ranjan and made their marriage successful but Ranjan always remained harsh to Maya. He had no respect and love for Maya and treated her like a maid. This resulted to utter frustration in Maya and led her to divert towards Nikhil. Impotency of Ranjan made Maya to attract towards Nikhil. Ranjan was totally a mamma's boy. He proved to be a perfect son but failed to be a perfect husband.

Shobha De projects the mismatched marriages, men's pride, patriarchal societal system and conventional customs of behaviour as the actual forces of women subjugation in her world of fiction. She focuses on developing female protagonists who are relatively much more liberated from social and moral confines than the normal, docile and obedient women. These women recognize how to survive themselves in the male supremacy. Shobha De's maturity and insightfulness have reached new heights in this novel.

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