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**PORTRAYAL OF CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGY IN SHOBHADE'S
SECOND THOUGHTS: A CRITIQUE**

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Abstract:

Shobha De has successfully conveyed the plight of contemporary urban women through her meticulous artwork. She introduces the human psychology with realism. The main theme of her novels is the psychological problem, urban Indian women face, especially due to the controversy between the old and new systems. She spoke about gender equality. In the majority of her works of fiction, the female protagonists find it difficult arduously to maintain their existence and assert their independence. She represents women who advocate for equality and peace. She has a profound understanding of the mental state of her heroines. The present paper analyses the novel Second Thoughts and offers a critique of conservative ideology.

Keywords: *Subjugation, Struggle for Existence, Emotional, Psychological Issues, Conservative Ideology, Liberalisation etc., etc.*

Indian authors have been writing in English for decades and have gained international recognition as a result. Women writers in India have achieved significant acclaim in the line of work of novel writing. Women writers successfully incorporate their experiences into fiction. In India, the number of female readers has increased significantly. They develop an empathetic understanding of their circumstances by reading novels about contemporary issues affecting women, such as subjugation, struggle for existence, and cultural crisis. It becomes increasingly difficult for contemporary Indian women to determine which path to take.

Shobha De's *Second Thoughts* is a realistic examination of contemporary women's difficulty, plight, and ambiguity in Indian metropolitan society, where she is entangled in traditional and modern webs of life. She has used brilliant, skilled language and a bold style to address these women's issues. She has demonstrated how contemporary women struggle to adjust to a new marriage arrangement, how they face challenges every day, and how their sufferings sometimes break them internally, causing them to experience a variety of emotional and psychological issues. Their constant stress is causing them to experience a variety of mental issues.

They also have personality disorders that cause them to withdraw from the public and lose interest in social relationships. Occasionally, their circumstances lead to neurosis and psychological disorders. Modern India has placed women on a difficult platform where, on the one hand, they are expected to be educated, modern, elegant, and liberated, while on the other hand, they are expected to submit to the patriarchal family system, particularly in her marital life. To save her marital relationship and maintain the happiness of her people, she is anticipated to endure any hardship. In her novel *Second Thoughts*, she explores these issues of contemporary Indian women in great depth. She has



performed a superb analysis of the psychology of women who suffer alone. Women's marital life is fraught with grave difficulties resulting from social and cultural adaptations.

The novel focuses on the suffering of a middle-class woman who suffers in her marriage and reflects so many married women who suffer as a result of the traditional arranged marriage system. Maya was a qualified, independence-loving Calcutta native. Her marriage was planned with an American-educated business executive in Bombay named Ranjan Malik. But the relationship is unsuccessful due to the partners' contradictory outlooks on life.

While Ranjan's entire upbringing has been western, he gives his wife no freedom and wants her to negotiate in good faith and adapt as a traditional Indian wife and mother. He desires for her to be completely subservient to his and his mother's whims and desires. He uses humiliation and satire to subdue her to his will. Maya desires a life of complete independence. She desires to experience the freedom of Bombay because, for years, she has felt stifled by her parents in Calcutta. She had travelled to Bombay to work as a reporter and alter the course of history.

In her novels, the emotional sickness of contemporary Indian women is anticipated and revealed. Her extensive research on female psychology demonstrates:

Her women characters try to strike a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Deeply exhausted by this trapeze act, they are further 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, (Krishnaswamy, 418).

Ranjan expected only house work and adherence to his mother's words from his wife. At times, his sarcastic remarks about her work even harm her. Once, he inquires if she has neglected to work around the house. Although Maya remains silent in response to his remarks, the novelist penetrates her psyche and discovers that she felt like a house servant.

I had bitten my tongue in dismay. I had wanted to say that I had worked in Calcutta, done household chores, but I had Never been made to feel like a servant. A menial. I didn't have a problem about doing my own housework. It was Ranjan's attitude that hurt me. The bank provided him a fairly generous allowance and we could well have afforded full-time help. But Ranjan was adamant (De, ST, 121).

Ranjan made repeated references to the Hindu scriptures' rules governing the behaviour of women and their traditional manner of living. He gave his wife no freedom of choice. His mother's approval was paramount for all decisions. The decisions were presented to his wife, who was expected to comply. She lacked her own free will. During their honeymoon in Mahabaleshwar, Ranjan admits to having had a sexual encounter with another woman.

Despite being told this, Maya harbours no hostility toward him. As expected, she establishes typical behaviour. Ironically, if a woman had admitted this, the typical Indian male would not have widely accepted her. In addition, Ranjan is uncomfortable with his wife's marital requirements. She is of least interest to him. He is consistently passive toward her. Maya feels unsatisfactory despite his presence. If she attempts to initiate something, he rejects it, and she is humiliated at his hands. He once says:



What's your problem? You are beginning to sound like some sort of nymphomaniac. Are you that sex- starved? Nothing else on your mind? How can sex being so important to anybody? I've never understood (De, *ST*, 351).

Maya has at times advocated for her women's rights. She repeatedly attempts to affirm her authority and free will. However, this has a negative effect. Ranjan develops suspicion. Their relationship becomes strained, and the harmony and peace are disturbed. Maya contemplates the entire circumstance. Modern life is so lonely. So lonely. No body to talk. No body to share anything with. Maya seeks distractions. Her own residence isn't any longer a source of comfort. She anticipates outsiders as an outlet. She occasionally converses with the vegetable vendor. Once, she has a dialogue with a Bangladeshi merchant who makes a very interesting observation about Bombay. He says:

This is Bombay. No time. No feelings. Everybody is saving his own skin. You fight, you shout, you scream. You die. Others will step over your corpse and carry on (De, *ST*, 124).

Maya is filled with anguish due to her husband's repeated neglect and criticism. As a result, she is unable to experience even the slightest happiness with him. Maya had anticipated a comfortable married life, but she feels humiliated by Ranjan's remarks. Once, Ranjan comments on the Bengali girls who immigrate to Bombay and dismantle their culture. He views Bombay's Bengali women as ultra-modern and immoral. He says:

You know... these Bombay girls are used to a very fast way of life. Their morals are no good. They don't speak proper Bengali. They don't know the rituals connected with our pujas. They wear all sorts of funny clothes; they refuse to oil their hair. They cannot cook our preparations. They don't know Bengali songs or dances. All they can do is to eat roadside food and dream of going to bars and discos. Such girls do not make good wives. Not at all (De, *ST*, 128).

Such demeaning remarks subject Maya to mental harassment and torture. Shobha De presents the psyches of her characters through minute details. Ranjan is content with his job and mother. Maya was constantly insulted with comparisons. Ranjan likens her to Bengali women, whom he describes as hysterical. He degrades his wife through comparisons. His embarrassing remarks and apathy cause his wife to be utterly miserable and lonely. Maya develops a deep, passionate friendship with her college-going neighbour Nikhil due to her emotional desires. Her profound frustration and depression lead to an extramarital sexual relationship.

Maya's life begins anew when she meets Nikhil. She appreciates her previous independence with him. With him, she has boundless joy. She finally appreciates her appearance in Bombay. She travels with him to numerous places. Maya is delighted to receive praise and recognition from Nikhil. Before he entered her life, she had been constantly evaluated, corrected, reprimanded, and humiliated. However, she now enjoys his company. When she explores Bombay with Nikhil, she makes the following remark: "For the first time since my arrival in your city, I felt like laughing, singing, enjoying the salty sea air on my face, I looked at the sky and felt happy" (De, *ST*, 128).

Nikhil uses her isolation to his advantage. He forces her into a physical relationship, which she initially resists, but later comes to enjoy. She experiences unity in his presence. He provides her with total physical and emotional satisfaction. However, she also feels a sense of guilt. There is a conflict within her, and numerous feelings crop up through her mind.



I should have stopped myself at that very point since I was not a free woman to pursue a friendship with a grown up man. Her interior monologue continues as she thinks “But Nikhil most definitely affected me and one part of me didn’t approve. This was ridiculous- a newly married woman day dreaming about a neighbour’s son. Disgusting and shameful (De, *ST*, 138).

Maya, who feels she should have sought a deeper understanding of her husband for the sake of mutual adjustment, experiences conflicting thoughts. The second thought to enhance her marriage enters her mind. At the same time, however, she is reassured of Ranjan’s extremely cold public persona. He consistently made her feel uncomfortable. Whenever she assumed of a home thereafter, she always recalled Calcutta, the home of her parents, with fondness. Ranjan had only married her to satisfy his mother's desires. He never cared about her emotions, and she was always alone with him. Once Maya sits helplessly contemplating her empty married life, she realises that her dream of a romantic life has been completely dashed.

But all of her efforts fail due to Ranjan’s egocentric and self-absorbed attitude. Maya symbolises the plight of all contemporary Indian women who are forced to concede their marriages as they are. Women endure the hardships of life in silence. Marriage is defined by Shobha De as:

Marriage to me connotes commitment and surrender, merging with, blending, overlapping and combing. It is a symbolic relationship where one feeds on the other, depends on the other, needs the other (De, *ST*, 3).

To conclude, the novel bears a dramatic conclusion. Clearly evident is her profound understanding of the conflict between conservative ideology and liberalisation among Indian women. The author has revealed the spiritual degeneration of the contemporary marriage system. Liberalization, gender issues, overbearing patriarchy, etc., are a few of the reasons for this. Modernity is a period of transition in which there is a commitment for new women's freedom, but the old male dominance system still reigns supreme and women are forced to submit to the existing social order.

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