

POST-MODERNIST ANALYSIS OF NEW WOMAN IN SHOBHA DE'S 'SECOND THOUGHTS'

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Today's literature is stuffed with the psychology of the female characters-their experiences caused by the orthodox society. The women novelists have tried to focus their sufferings, their sexual problems, their marital discord, their frustration, their alienation, their extra-marital relationship, their exploitation, their sufferings from domestic injustice etc. It is very difficult task to examine women psychology because she is too complex in her behaviour. But in English literature there is a galaxy of the writers who have tried to delve into her inner world so as to dig out the hidden roots of her temperament so that her problems may bring into light properly.

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Now-a-days the concept of new woman means the woman of middle class with new thoughts. She is not like the woman of the past who tolerates every kind of exploitation, suffering, torture, injustice without raising her voice. Her emotions and feelings have been suppressed by the male subjugative society since ever. As we know through psychology, if anybody's desires and feelings have been suppressed, crushed and ignored, means there will be a revolt whether in thoughts or in action and as a result, it bursts in the form of lava of volcano in his later life, or we can say these disturbances of life echo in his life and want full satisfaction. Amar Nath Prasad rightly observes in this connection in his article "Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* : A Novel of Psycho-analytical Treatment" : "Psychology shows that if a man's ardent desire in his early life is crushed or suppressed, it bursts like a lava of volcano in his later life. In other words, disappointment, frustration or repressed sentiments begin to take these toll in the sufferer's life" (197)

Shobha De's greatness lies in the fact that she lays emphasis on the psychological realities of the present day tormented world. She thinks afresh about the problems of women and her radical thinking shocks and startles many. In her novel *Second Thoughts* she deals with the dilemma of woman who suffers from the hollowness of her married life. She provokes the reader's thoughts by presenting before him those questions which are generally avoided or swept under the carpet. The novel is the story of Maya and Ranjan who are locked in an almost meaningless marriage. Maya's life is sacrificed in favour of Ranjan's mother who suffers from some illness absorbs Ranjan's attention completely where she finds Ranjan completely indifferent towards herself. She takes the lead and tries to draw his attention by various ways. Ranjan not only remains indifferent but also begins to distance her from himself in various ways. It does matter

whether she likes Bombay or not she wants the marital bliss which Ranjan completely fails to realise : "I wanted to tell Ranjan that that wasn't my idea of discovering a city. That's not how I wanted Bombay to happen to me. I wasn't interested in taking in the sights". (De, *ST* 38)

In spite of all her efforts Ranjan refuses to budge however, she does not loose hope she still cherishes the idea that one day she would conquer him with her feminine charm and tricks one day. She even shows some boldness in bed to awaken Ranjan towards her emotional and physical requirements but all this proves useless as Ranjan is obsessed with something else which leaves him completed, incapable of responding to female overtures : "Ranjan rolled off me and leaned on his elbows. 'I'm not ready yet, he said slowly. 'Maya... you'll have to be patient. It's going to take time. I can't. I just can't". (75)

The third character of the novel Nikhil is mentioned in the very first chapter. He is a college going student with a handsome personality and attractive feature. He is capable of impressing others at first sight. He is described as one who looks like a warrior returning from a victory. As one reads the novel, one realises that this impression is in no way wrong : "A smile so unexpected and so completely disarming when it was flashed that it transformed his features almost miraculously and made him look a warrior leading a victory parade." (23-24)

Maya's life grows bleaker everyday. She is not allowed to pursue any career and cherish any hobbies. In the process of the narrative, the writer describes the familial scene in the orthodox India where women have to look after the family, the comforts of their husband first. They are not supposed to have an identity of their own who underlines the fact that undue suppression of women may lead to unusual consequences as it happens in the novel itself; "In any Indian family, the husband's comforts always come first". (15)

Ranjan's behaviour continues to remain cold and indifferent. He hurts the feelings of Maya time and again knowingly and unknowingly. There is a long process of Maya's distancing from him. During this process there goes on a parallel process of her coming closer to Nikhil. Manytimes she realises that this intimate closeness is unacceptable to society but she is helpless as Ranjan's indifference powerfully pushes him towards Nikhil. Bipin Parmar remarks about Maya's gradual drift towards Nikhil ;

She is quite aware of the fact that Nikhil was other than her lawful man. She also knew well that to make friendship with him was an act of breach of social and moral code. But when her all hopes and dreams as well as her attempts to seek love from her legitimate husband failed, she decided to strike up friendship with Nikhil she allowed herself to be enjoyed and loved in the company of Nikhil. (*New Woman*228-229)

While Maya is a helpless woman victimized by hopeless circumstances, Nikhil is a vessel of emotions. He is a young boy who is easily fascinated by feminine charm. While Maya wishes to confine herself to a friendship based on sympathy and understanding, Nikhil a youngman who can go up to a physical relationship for the fulfilment of his desires. Maya is a pure woman in the sense that she never thinks of having physical relationship with Nikhil : "That was when it occurred to me that in all my longings for Nikhil, not once had I imagined myself having a sexual relationship with him". (261)

This process continues till it results in Nikhil's presumptuous boldness. It is Nikhil's birthday he thinks it fit to celebrate it with Maya. He visits Maya's place wishing happy birthday to himself. In a rare moment of excitement he kisses Maya whole heartedly. She is shocked at first at Nikhil's unusual boldness and confidence. At this ecstatic Nikhil's eyes are closed as he pushes her to her bed through mazy way. Maya

is surprised at Nikhil's knowledge of the inside setting of her house. While it is an exciting day for Nikhil Maya has eaten nothing since morning. The writer inherent comment is that what is going to happen is nothing impious. Like Nikhil, Maya's eyes are also closed and it frees her from all moral responsibility and establishes her as a pure woman. Nikhil makes love to her very skillfully and Maya surrenders completely before him when her caftan is removed she is not sure whether her body impresses Nikhil or not but she is sure about the fact that she would not go away from Nikhil even if Ranjan comes there. Nikhil is very refined in his love- making and when he enters her she feels no pain. She feels a special kind of power in holding him her prisoner. She wants to keep him her prisoner forever. In a rare excitement she finds it difficult to keep pace with Nikhil. She feels a unique ecstasy and it is rare moment of her life. Shobha De refutes the traditional concept of female sexuality which regards woman as passive participants in the act much goes on inside them which remains unnoticed ;

My eyes were seeing inner pictures that had nothing to do with my room, my house, my childhood or my immediate environment. I could hear music that wasn't playing anywhere, not even in my mind discordant chords without a beginning or an end. (381)

Shobha De's approach reminds the reader of Luce Irigaray's concept of female sexuality which regards it as one of plurality. It is limitless in scope and fluid in nature. This limitlessness enables shobha De to incorporate the so called radical views into it. Bhaskar A. Shukla summarises Irigaray's points in these words ;

She envisions a sexuality and a system based on excess plurality, one in which females and males relate to one another directly; a sexuality and a system that is limitless in scope, fluid in practice, ever-changing and ever-expanding. (*Notion* 13-22)

After the act Maya feels like entering a new phase of life. She feels asif she is completely metamorphosed. She perspires with a rare joy and her skin glows with exceptional radiation. She has no wish to remove the impression of their physical relationship. She realises that she become more beautiful. Infact, this new beauty is born inside her mind which glows with a magnificent halo after the moment of fulfilment ;

I glanced at the image in the bathroom mirror. Even my tangled hair looked like a magnificent halo. The smudged Kanjal in my eyes gave them an unreal luminosity as they shone like coals. I wished Ranjan was here to see me now. I looked beautiful. Truly beautiful. (*ST* 382)

She feels herself once with Nikhil and wants to share her feelings with him. In fact, there is a tumult going inside her and she wants to make Nikhil a part of that tumult. Infact her fulfilment is not continued to physical level only. She wants the psychological satisfaction which is possible only through communication with Nikhil. The psychological state of Maya is well captured in the words by Shobha De thus : "I longed to hear Nikhil's voice. To shade my feelings with him. To make him a part of my tumult-a tumult created by him and known only to him." (388)

This disharmonious relationship is painfully long and Ranjan misses no opportunity of hurting Maya. On the other hand Nikhil's company grows warmer and more sympathetic step by step. Maya feels like turning to Nikhil to get rid of the continuous chain of heart feelings. While Ranjan is never tired of letting her down. Nikhil does not hurt her even in their first physical encounter. Shobha De uses the term 'accomplish' deliberately to indicate to the fact that what Nikhil is doing is nothing immoral. He is relieving a woman

after pain and trauma : "Nikhil was inside me now. He'd accomplished it painlessly, smoothly, gently. As I held him prisoner within my body. I felt an over whelming sense of power." (378)

After this passive state in which Maya feels power for the first time, the act begins. Shobha De describes it as a dance which is no less than ecstasy. Maya is not able to keep pace with Nikhil. When he has gone, she feels a rare relief. She does no effort to erase the marks of their union.

When she comes to know about Nikhil's marriage she is inworldly broken. She feels that she is about to loose Nikhil all home she had centred her future's hopes. When Nikhil's mother tells her about his marriage it seems asif something breaks within her. When she describes him as a *bachcha* she is surprised beyond limit as he is mature enough to respond to her needs. She is so shocked that she rests her arms on the fridge to avoide falling on the ground ;

I leaned against the refrigerator to steady myself. My entire body was shaking with mirth. The more I stared at the spilled soup, the funnier I found it. I knew I would have to make it again from scratch.

So what? I had all the time in the world now. (402)

Though she was very much aware that she was violating the sentimonious norms of the pious institution of marriage, yet she did not restrain herself to check the illicit relationship between Nikhil and herself It was the out come of the sustained psychological trauma of a new woman mindset who was married to a wrong person of antagonistic qualities because her husband, though, tried perpetually to exhort the lesson of futality of sex and the need for virtues, but he never even once thought it necessary to gratify the lady's carnal arch which is also a dominant factor to keep intact the man-woman relationship in marital life. Therefore, it is an established reality that Maya was continuously suffering under the agony of marital dilemma.

In the novel the sickness of Ranjan's mother plays havoc. In the wider context there may be numerous reasons for the male indifference towards the female requirements. In the present day materialistic world one finds little time for the emotional needs of one's partner. The present day life is so rootlessly hectic that emotions are pushed out of the mental scene. The strong message of the novel is that the emotional aspect of life is to be taken note of at all costs. If this reality is ignored, the orthodox morality will shatter like broken pieces of glass. Shobha De makes the reader stop a while and revised his approach to life in the light of this reality.

Shobha De invited severe criticism due to her radical thinking. There is a group of critics who deny literary status to her works. They think that her novels are part of popular fiction and they deserve no sincere critical attention. They regard her a clever writer who mints money through cheap tricks. But the fact is that she has exceptional courage in dealing with radical issues. To deny her the place of a great novelist is gross injustice to her. R.K. Mandaliya underlines her courage for free and radical thinkings in these words in his famous article "Literature and Popular Fiction : Does Shobha De Demand A *Second Thought*?" ;

We should also spare some such words for our Indian woman who has courage to write on such a delicate issue inspite of all the constraints of society. Shobha De has largely become a victim of envy of those who have failed to achieve her height in the Indian literary scene. (212-213)

Thus Shobha De can not be dismissed as an ordinary novelist. She is a writer of rare psychological insight and her novels are sincere studies into human psychology. In *Second Thoughts* she focuses on the

psychology of a helpless woman caught in the ruthless wave of society. She longs for a meaningful life which the cruel world denies her. Circumstances lead her on her way and she moves in a direction which is not acceptable to the traditional value bound society. The fact is that she can not scarifies her life at the altar of dead custom. She finds satisfaction, if only a temporary one. She finds this fulfilment without violoting the norms deliberately. She does nothing, things happen to her. The force of psychological realities and compulsions is shown no where in Shobha De's novels as in *Second Thoughts*.

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