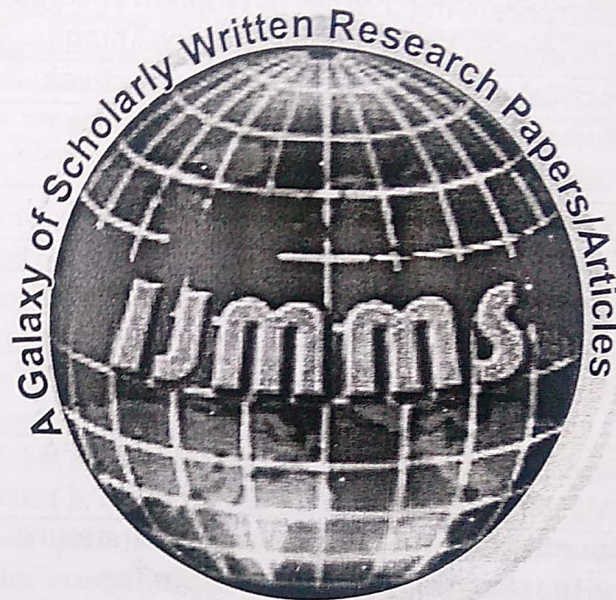


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**Struggle for Survival in Shobha De's Second Thoughts****Mr. Shahaji Rajaram Karande**

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**Abstract:**

Shobha De concentrates on women's problems and narrates each and every aspects of human relationship. Women in Shobha De's novels symbolize the overpowering materialism and the lack of spirituality that characterizes modern age. Shobha De, as a novelist, has tried to call the attention of the readers to the kind of treatment meted out to women in India. The present paper focuses the women's struggle for survival in Shobha De's *Second Thoughts*. The novelist throws light on human nature and inner self of the character. The efforts are made to probe into the characters' inner working, their motivations and feelings. This novel plunges into the inner recesses of the character and lays bare inside out. The agony and anxiety of the newly married woman is at the centre in this novel. Maya, a young middle class Bengali girl, is the protagonist of this novel. She is born and brought up in Calcutta and married to a Bengali boy Ranjan who is settled in the city of Bombay.

**Key Words:** overpowering materialism, struggle for survival, motivations and feelings, inner recesses.

**Introduction:** Shobha De concentrates on women's problems and narrates each and every aspects of human relationship. Her novel 'Second Thoughts' throws light on human nature and inner self of the character. The efforts are made to probe into the characters' inner working, their motivations and feelings. This novel plunges into the inner recesses of the character and lays bare inside out. The agony and anxiety of the newly married woman is at the centre in this novel. Maya, a young middle class Bengali girl, is the protagonist of this novel. She is born and brought up in Calcutta and married to a Bengali boy Ranjan who is settled in the city of Bombay. Maya is a pretty young girl. She is quite innocent and novice in the metropolis. She has great fascination for the city. In fact she is in love with Bombay. She thinks that marrying Ranjan is like marrying Bombay and considers herself the luckiest girl in her locality. The prologue tells us much about their pre-marriage scenario. Maya, with her mother, came to Bombay to meet Ranjan. Maya, her mother Chitra and Pradippma met the Maliks as per appointment. This was their first formal gathering. Maya and Ranjan saw each other for the first time. In fact, they liked each other as Maya says:

"I'd met him just once in a formal gathering and I have to be honest and admit that I'd liked him. He liked me too-that's how we got married."

During their first meeting, it is decided that Maya would not be allowed to join duty outside even though she was trained as a textile designer. Then Maya and Ranjan got engaged in matrimonial alliance with mutual consent. In this way, Maya, with the dreams in her heart, wedded Mr. Malik, a handsome Bombay boy of twenty eight. She wanted to be a part of Bombay and a part of her husband's life. Maya was really a sensible and sensitive lady. After her marriage, Maya did every possible effort to serve her husband. But Ranjan was a different kind of man. He was short tempered and suspicious by nature. Some time he behaved like a kid. He started finding faults in Maya's work. Thus, soon after her marriage, Maya began to receive her surprise and than shocks. In the first stage, she discovered that Ranjan was very conservative even though he had received

foreign education. But her surprise turned into a shock when she came to know that Ranjan was quite cool as a husband. He didn't even care for his wife's dreams and desires, emotions and feelings. Here began her disillusionment. After the two weeks of their marriage, they went for four days clumsy sex-honeymoon at a depressing hotel in Mahabaleshwar, a hill resort near Bombay. Before this, Maya was under the impression that Ranjan was a bachelor in and out. As she said:

"...this was the foreign educated modern, confident Bombay boy of twenty-eight who had never known another woman I'd married a virgin."

But during their tenure of honeymoon, one night, she asked him about his past relationship with other girls. In the beginning, he denied responding but Maya was very curious to know his past life before he met her. She insisted on him to let her know his past. So being reluctant, he ultimately decided to be frank and started to tell:

"---they're...they're different. I never know what is going on in her heads. I have tried to make friends with them.... but it has never worked."

He might be called impotent. Out of frustration, she thought that she won't be the mother in future. She was unable either to speak or to endure it. Besides his physical coolness, her husband was a strange sort of man. He didn't even care to cater her emotional requirements. He considered her inferior to him and his background. There was a dearth of passion and emotion in his behavior. All these made Maya feel completely lonely and neglected. She was greatly pained by Ranjan's detached attitude towards her. A woman doesn't have her own voice, place and identity. She has to merge her identity into others. Her actions are always determined by others. She is considered inferior to man in every respect. Ranjan's mother cherishes the value of patriarchy. He considers his mother all in all his life. He performs his routine as per his mother's instructions. Therefore his mother calls him twice in a day. Ranjan does not even allow Maya to know the content of his conversation with his mother. Actually, he is very skeptical person. He thinks that no one to be trusted there as it is Bombay. He does not take her for outing nor does he permit her to be mixed with other people. Her life is confined within the four walls of their flat. All her material is provoked to her. But she deprived of emotionally and physically as well. So Maya feels like a caged pigeon. Ranjan fails to understand that mere material things can build a house not a home. As he said:

"I don't understand you, Maya what's your problem? You live in a comfortable decent house there's no shortage of money I treat you well you have all the time in the world ....I even eat whatever you give."

Her life is controlled and commanded by her husband. A woman is the worst victim of the patriarchal social system. Maya realizes that her decision of marrying Ranjan was a grave mistake in her life. She lost interest and faith in her life. Therefore Maya decided to take initiative and try her luck with Ranjan. So Maya had snuggling up to him and caressing him one night as they were in bed. But Ranjan jumped as though he had received an electric shock and said "stop behaving

like a cheap woman. A prostitute". Maya said that she decided to behave like a cheap woman, a prostitute. She adds:

"I wasn't getting any sleep. My knee was still hurting and the old ache between the legs was bothering me. I reached out for Ranjan".

Then Ranjan moved away from her and said

"please, Maya I'm tired. I have been travelling. A man needs some rest and a little peace after hectic tour".

She led to believe that they were not husband and wife in true sense. Her existence became painful and miserable. It had no utility. A sense of non-belonging was constantly biting her soul. So she began to despise herself she said sadly as she sat by the window.

"I had never felt so useless. Nobody needed me, absolute nobody. My parent no longer thought that I belonged to them. My husband belonged to his mother. It was unlikely I would bear children who would belong to me. And I didn't have a single friend to call my own."

During this period of utter loneliness and misery, a college going boy named Nikhil Varma came into her life. He was very charming and appreciative. He, with systematic efforts and persuasion, won Maya's heart. In the beginning, she avoided his advances like a chaste woman. She was quite aware of the fact that Nikhil was other than her lawful man. 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. She felt the beauty and pleasure of her life. That is why she dared to go on outing with Nikhil at Malbar hill as she admits.

"---I was ready to jump on Nikhil's motorbike and say "good-bye" to my un inspiring life without the slightest regret."

Nikhil filled Maya with power and pleasure while Ranjan filled her with sadness and misery. Though Nikhil was junior to Maya by five or six years. He was expert in love making. His movement was musical sooth and refined. She says:

**Nikhil was surprisingly refined, there wasn't a single awkward or a rough caress, as his fingers stroked my body. They made music of sweetest kind".**

Thus, Maya felt happy, wonderful. She found meaning of her existence. Nikhil stands in quite contrast with Ranjan. Ranjan is very conservative and cool whereas Nikhil is modern, quite young, energetic and cheerful person. He leads free and unchecked life. It is Nikhil who brings joy and happiness in Maya's life.

But she was born with hard luck. Some days after her encounter with Nikhil, she came to know through Nikhil's mother that he was betrothed to a girl named Anshu. The news left Maya

motionless and unthinking. But she was able to control her feelings. She was not frightened but she was contained. As she says:

“I knew I would have to make it again from scratch. So what? I had all the time in the world now”.

Maya learnt a new way of life. She has broken social and moral code to protect herself and to establish her identity. Maya is assertive and self willed. She is meditative about her placement in patriarchal society. She is capable enough of taking bold decision. She wants to end up her unreal and false life. She hungers to have her own identity, her own voice and her own place in the family.

In this way, “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.

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