

# Search for Identity in Shobha De's 'Socialite Evenings' and 'Second Thoughts'

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**Abstract:** *India has been male dominated society for ages. Condition of women has been pitiable and they have been object of great suffering. Feminist movement has done a great job for bringing women position better. These movement have changed the very pitiable condition of women. Indian contemporary writers like Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai and Shobha De have tried their best to improve the position of women. In their writing, there is feminist voice demanding womens voice for freedom. Traditionally, work of traditional writers has been under under-valued, but with the swift chage of time, their work is highly valued. Shobha De's seventh novel 'Second Thoughts (1996)' explores the female psyche against male ego. It is a love story about Maya, a pretty woman who goes to Mumbai for the glamour. The novel takes deep insights into the culture, norms, and social belief of Indian community. Shobha's novels show feminist voice, there is voice for their rights, and the message of DE's novel's is to bring the balance in both male and female. Her ovel shows thye feelings of fmiism.*

**Keywords:** Male Dominated, Pitiable, Movement, Contemporary, Ego. Feminism

## I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is the state I which a female is given the same value like a male one as female is also a independent being. Shobha De's works include- Small Betrayals (2014), Shethji (2012), Superstar India: From Incredible to Unstoppable, Surviving Men (1998), Selecting Memory (1998), Second Thoughts (1996), Small Betrayals (1995), Shooting from Hip (1994), Sultry Days (1994), Sisters (1992), Starry Nights (1989), Socialite Evenings (1989), Sandhya's Secret (2009), John Stuart Mill argued that contemporary woman were little better off than slaves and predicted new avenues of freedom and opportunity in an ensuing age of change. Sarah Grimke felt human rights are not based on sex, Colour, capacity or condition... only despots will deny to woman that supreme sovereignty over her own person and conduct which law concedes to man Grimke feels absolute equality between husband and wife would lead to a true relation free of difficulties. Grimke of Mill's views were contrary to the notions prevalent in society then. The structure of marriage remained unchallenged unquestioned. "Black women, whose ancestors were brought to the United States from Africa in the bondage of slavery, have lived through conditions of cruelties so horrible, so bizarre, that the women had to re-invest themselves. Women were denied adequate room, food or breathing space. They were made to work hard on the fields and were not given proper wages. Black women were allowed to have no sense of shame, no respect, and no regard for the feelings of husband or parent," (Singh, Deepak Kumar, 5).

Sadly, thing have not changed tangibly in countries like India in spite of the metamorphosis of the good woman into the new woman of today. Writers have raised their voice time and again against the universal apartheid being perpetrated against the suffering have nots (Woman) as a consequence of gender bias of the bourgeois attitudes of the have alls (Men).

Being a willing or unwilling partner of man in the ways of the world. The woman can't even revolve in an organized way a the have nots have done. She continues to suffer silently most of the time.

Hardy, Forster, George Eliot, Bronte Sisters, GB Shaw, Kate Chopin et all. Have been some of the prominent writers who took up the cause of the suffering woman. The woman has tried to assert her individuality in the works of many writers in indo Anglian Literature. RK Narayan (Rosie) Naintara Sehgal, Shasi Deshpande, Kamla Das, Arundhati Roy,

Shobha De's etc. Much has been written in the previous two decades to make visible dents into the crumbling citadel of our male chauvinistic society. The new woman is well on her way in quest of her identity. Inheriting a cumulative wisdom from her predecessors she is now competent enough to call a spade, a spade. She has a strong affinity for tradition but a stronger attachment to self respect and individuality. The time has come to put marriage in its present form under scrutiny. Inequality breeds resentment. Resentment on a large scale spells doom for any society or family. "Ophelia's innocent guile, quick, yet uncertain, for the unbalanced mind takes no bearings," (Barker, 75).

Shobha De's '**Second Thoughts**' is a successful attempt to bring about the plight of the new Woman who is cornered in the maze of domestic chores and takes an unconventional decision to keep her individuality her "Self esteem" intact.

Maya's middle class family is over eager for getting her marriage solemnized with the foreign returned bombaite Ranjan because boys like Ranjan.

"...get snapped up before you and I can blink our eyes..."

"Ranjan is quite a catch"

Maya's mother is Chitra whose main concern is to get Maya selected. Countless hang ups (kaajal, Punctuality, dress, appearance) keep her over conscious on the day of the interview. The interview is dominated by Mrs. Malik and Chitra chips in, now and then only to corroborate the pearls of wisdom" that flow from Mrs. Malik's Mouth. (Middle class syndrome) Mrs. Malik has double standards her son has returned from the USA to do the cooking, cleaning etc." just for her sake; but Maya is supposed to do all the work:

"our Indian boys are so spoilt you know"

They irony is that she has so many servants but her son won't keep a part time cook in spite of a fairly generous allowance from the bank.

Ranjan opposes the proposal of Maya's taking up a career as textile designer on the grounds that he is earning well enough to support a family.

"I believe it is a woman's duty to run a good home."

It's crystal clear that the family of a middle class girl is ready to throw all canons of self respect and individuality just to make the kite of wedlock soar in the turbulent winds of the husband's so called superiority. The woman's sense and sensibility is reduced to a hopelessly pulpy mass of malleable and ductile servility supposed to be ever ready to lick a fanciful or moody husband from toe to top just for security... just for a roof... just for shelter.

Though Chitra thinks that Maya has fallen head over heels' in love with Ranjan in reality Maya was completely in love with Bombay, not the Ranjan of Bombay.

After marriage Maya tries her best to keep the house. Ranjan is of the I, me, Myself type, Mamma's child who wants all the attention round the clock. His regular bouts of depression, aches, joint pains, gas leave no time to Maya.

"He'd screw up his eyes tightly shake his head from  
Side to side and start groaning, clutching whichever  
Part of his anatomy was meant to be bothering him..."

Ranjan ignores or loathes anything liked by her: a simple outing or her love for flowers. She's not supposed to talk to her neighbours or even salesmen (Rob and Rape). He has brought his banking instincts home with his auditor's probing eyes on every expenditure and his obsession with the balancing budgeting act (using STD Facility Or AC to be used in his presence)

The shadow of his mother looms large over the household permeating the whole atmosphere and reverberating throughout. Maya wants to go out "least on weekends". But Ranjan thinks she is talking like a kid.

"Life isn't a picnic..."

May be, but life isn't thorns, thorns, thorns all the way is life a person where a young, ambitious, beautiful and yearning girl has come to serve a life term with cramping work, condemned to live with a suspicious, sickly refrigerator of a husband? Maya's coveted dream is to discover Bombay but who can convince a wall to move!

Ranjan's supersensitive olfactory nerves and taste buds wreak havoc on Maya... Rice has burnt or someone has been in the room, etc.

All her culinary efforts are belittled by Ranjan who always finds too much of this too little of that.” Ranjan has no recognition for Maya’s talents:

“Bombay is like New York... Tough competitive...

People don’t waste time on nobodies (P.28)

If Maya wants to have a try, mamma’s baby vetoes the proposal:

“But mummy won’t like it”

It’s always back to square one. When Maya says that she is lonely, Ranjan simply can’t imagine an intelligent person being lonely and rattles off a series of cold, mechanical activities (TV, music, reading, cleaning etc)

Maya is for him, not he for her. If at all she wants to talk, he picks up his pet refrain.

“A man comes home to relax after slogging all

Day.... He wants a hot bath, meal, soothing

Conversation, not this rubbish....

A woman cooped up in the house whole day may also have desires, dreams, aspirations.

Ranjan reminds us of Marco in RK Narayan’s the Guide whose coldness and frigidity forces his wife Nalini to drift away she says:

“I’d have preferred any kind of mother-in-law if it

Had meant one real, live husband.”

Maya also wants a real, live husband.

Lack of sleep, lack of physical exercises and mental vacuity steer maya into a state of terminal boredom. Never for once does it occur to Ranjan that Maya is made of flesh and blood and may desire something apart from food and shelter.

It is in these moments of abject dejection and forlorn Identity that memories of Nikhil flood her to help her overcome her present discomfiture. Nikhil is a symbol of independent life a happy go lucky type. He doesn’t hesitate to compliment her on her good looks:

“you look like a beautiful garden today (p. 45)

And recognizes her loneliness.

Nikhil is appreciative; Ranjan is disparaging. Every meeting with Nikhil leaves her flushed, confused but longing for another glimpse. She meets Nikhil hardly for a moment or so in the first half of the novel but that is enough to fill her with a longing to see him again, Ranjan is a mechanical husband dangling between office and home with his mother as the epicenter.

Nikhil is down to earth a real man with his urges or instincts good or bad not a showroom clay model. He’s made of real flesh and blood while Nikhil treats her as a friend, Ranjan treats her as a servant.

“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” (P.47)

Ranjan always overestimates himself and underscores Maya’s merits. On tom’s visit, Ranjan is over conscious and overacts, keeping Maya at a distance. But Tom is clever enough to see through things Later, Ranjan Congratulates himself on his grand success but Maya knows better:

“I knew Tom had actually liked me. And perhaps

Felt a little sorry about the dismissive way in which

Ranjan kept talking to me”

It is worth mentioning how Nikhil would have dealt with the situation in Ranjan’s Place:

“I concluded that the main difference would have lain in his complete naturalness, as opposed to Ranjan’s stiff self Consciousness”

“Like an eager student trying desperately to impress his class teacher”

Unequal to the task of running the family Ranjan never treats Maya as an equal. Maya craves for love: emotional, physical the foundation of family life, apart from running and panting, getting and spending. But Ranjan's act of lovemaking is antiseptic, sterilized (and sterile)

"But the love making that followed was always a let down"

(Initially I had blamed myself for it. And then I discovered something... I'd married a virgin"

Ranjan and Maya live in different worlds. Ranjan can never bear to imagine Maya talking to some one else (The two R's Robbery, Rape: the refrain) he can't think of the sublime demands of the human soul. Maya learns to recognize herself, more so when Ranjan is away. In Ranjan's absence, she feels free to breathe normally even a missing handkerchief is reason enough for a tumultuous situation.

To match such whimsical behavior of a dictatorial husband is a song dedicated to her by a man not any man but Nikhil who had been inspired by her something more flattering than anything else she had ever experienced she weeps but wants to hear it again and again.

Nikhil is a foil to Ranjan she remembers his compliments, his cutting remarks, his frankness: she feels wanted she feels that she belongs. She learns to love herself, her appearance, especially on blue Tuesdays she'd be giving Idle Treats to Nikhil at her doorstep.

This is a significant change in her – the New Woman is Waking up – the incarnation is round the corner : her identity is taking shape.

Ranjan is dictatorial : Nikhil, persuasive, feeling kind and energetic the symbol of joy but she still has her loyalty intract and Nikhil's song "Lonely Lady" Provides the background music of hope in her otherwise cumbersome and monotonous family life this "Loyalty" refuses Nikhil's offer of bhel in spite of her heart's tugging her in the opposite direction.

The same loyalty to Ranjan makes Maya refuse Nikhil's offer of taking her around Bombay. He knows Maya's loneliness but would not hurt her feelings'

"I'm not going to rape you or anything; I won't even touch you, if that makes you feel better"

Maya wanted to go but her inhibitions hold her back. The new Woman has grown in her but she has'nt learnt to assert herself as yet :

"I wished I could. I wished my conversation was different. I wanted more than anything else to laugh and converse freely and ask Nilhil a thousand questions"

Her mind tries to hold her back but her whole being is up in revolt in a mood to perform a coup d'etat temporary though it be.

"and yet there was the other pull tugging me in the opposite direction"

She wants to say goodbye to her uninspiring life without the slightest regret and she does jump on Nikhil's motorbike for a tryst with destiny.

Nothing conspicuous transpires between them on that fateful morning but Maya enjoys the ride around Malabar Hil her first beer, and the free air without hassles. Being temperamentally coy she feels embarrassed of being found out in the beginning but soon she settles down and takes the world just available to her coolly in her stride. Her being married doesn't mean she has no right to enjoy herself just for once:

"that didn't prevent me from longing for an innocent outing like this and grabbing the opportunity to enjoy it when it presented itself... he seemed to have recognized my loneliness and claustrophobia"

"...I lay awake all night dreaming of a large bird swooping down on me, claws out"

The imagery is tearing, touching and realistic. Her letter to Nikhil in the wee hours of the morning is revealing, exploratory and introspective. She knows that she is slipping into unconventional waters but principles and traditions do have to give way to the basic calls of the soul. Emotional needs assert themselves again and again to find consummation in a stray opportunity here and there to fulfill the yearnings of an imprisoned soul.

"the fact is, it was one of the best days of my life"

Ranjan remains busy making courteous overtures to his female colleagues ignoring Maya completely at the party he has taken her to. She feels insulted. Nikhil pays attention to her whenever they meet. He is just like an apparition to

help her in moments of need : a heckling postman or carrying her baggage upstairs while her husband drops midway to meet his mother on his return from the tour. She is not loved by the man she is tied to : and she can't tie up with the man she'd love to :

“other than the odd mole hunt my body remained uncharted territory”

“our life in the bedroom had settled into routine. We could have been brothers. Or sisters or flat mates. Even when Ranjan did reach out for me, it was a gesture devoid of any passion.”

Ranjan is blissfully unaware of the turmoil she passes through each moment but she?

“And I longed for the perfect romantic companion if such a creature existed at all outside my imagination.”

Just because she is honour bound, she is walking to her own doom. She has never known the peak or crown of conjugal life but is clear to her that whatever she knew at Ranjan's hands wasn't at all what married life was meant to be. There were bound to exist landscapes beyond the vistas she was confined to. Ranjan leaves her yearning and flustered and frustrated. Ranjan things that money and other such materialistic comforts (strictly stunted in their case) are enough to satisfy a woman's ideas of life. But sadly so, that is not her cup of tea, there are other things indispensable to the very existence of human beings. How unilateral and unfounded Ranjan's observations can be is evident from the following lines (scrutinizing words within brackets, mine)

“there's no shortage of money (save and except your skinning audit for any penny you give even confiscating her personal money given by her mother apart from your lectures on economizing throughout)

“I treat you well (as a master treats a slave, a trainer a dog, or as a surgeon's treatment of an etherized patient on a sterilized operation table).”

So, the consummation of Maya's simmering love for Nikhil doesn't come unexpectedly. Revolt is the last resort and all other avenues have exhausted. The Narmada dam has held the turbulent waters for an intolerably long period and hence, when the vindicating sluice presents itself at the opportune moment, she feels helpless while being back marched by Nikhil to her bedroom, ignoring and telling her to ignore a stray bell or two that might happen to but in at peak time as if to cry: “Hold, Hold”.

The deluge is complete, all consuming and the raging inferno is smothered, she has been recognized accepted, completely spent and smoothly taken care of. Maya has broken the norms for once while others have ignored for it for ages. So here is a new ray of hope for her a new way to live: a new promise of life.

“I felt beautiful. I wanted to look beautiful”

These thoughts should have been her first thoughts. But now she has become wiser. Even when she comes to know that Nikhil is getting married and she may not meet him again, she is not alarmed but contained.

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

She has found herself she knows how to live – she can give a slip here and there to assert herself : she can play ball now whether Ranjan Plays or not.

The novel does disturb male chauvinists habituated to basking in the light of their self concocted glory: the basking” is interrupted for once. The second thoughts that arise in Maya's mind may very well be the harbinger of the first thoughts that could come to the mind of the new woman of the future who has to take decisions (unconventional at times) to assert her individuality and establish her identity. Male chauvinistic Matadors need to tighten up and be prepared for a showdown from the “crucified” whose gods they have been all along!

## II. THEME OF SOCIALITE EVENINGS

Socialite Evenings is a romantic tale, suffused with feminist traits. The theme of novel is the Image of New Women, Search for Identity or struggle for identity. The novel describes Mumbai high society and explores the lives of bored, rich house wives trapped in loveless marriages and engaging in ill fated extramarital affairs. The novel also denotes social respectability, fashionable parties, false spiritual leaders. It is a romantic theme describes patriarchal Indian Society in which woman is given a special role. It also denotes marginalization of Indian Women at the hands of their husbands. Shobha has depicted women as the motivating factors in the society. The novel is not concerned with the lot of women, but concerned changes to ‘I am the good thing’ and even this ‘I does not stand for any commitment to

spiritual and moral values, but it is a good quality'. Karuna is divorced by her husband and she has to move from one place to the another in search of job. Her chief concern is how she can shake of the middle class background. Karun's husband is lack of a ideal husband.

## II. THEME OF 'SECOND THOUGHTS'

The 'Second Thoughts' is Shobha's seventh novel focuses on 'the hollowness of Indian Marriage'. Shobha explores female psyche against male ego. De has deeply penetrated the issues of Indian women. She has well analysed problems of women like repression struggle foe existence, cultural crisis, and many other problems of modern world.

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