



RESTRAINT OF THE SELFHOOD IN SHOBHAA DE'S *SECOND THOUGHT*

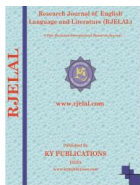
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Abstract

Selfhood is the state of being individualistic and having the sense of liberty, and freedom to do what an individual wants, be it clothing, fooding, choosing the carrier they desired. Self is the person in us, the way we behave, feel or look without artifice. Shobhaa De in her novel *Second Thought* explores the inner self of the female protagonist Maya. Social conditioning becomes the obstacles to Maya's quest for selfhood and that she only feels disintegration, resignation and rejection. This paper will analyze how Maya's true self slowly falls apart with her marriage with Ranjan. She was keen on pursuing a career as a textile designer; however, her dream collapses even before she dreams of as her husband disagrees with the idea of his wife working outside the home. She started to feel alienated even in the presence of her husband which shows the disappointment with her matrimony with Ranjan. De's *Second Thought* mirror Maya's journey of the self where she suppressed her true selfhood and confined in the traditional norms of the society which her husband believed in.

Keywords: Alienation, identity, selfhood, suppression, marriage

Literature plays a very vital role in mirroring almost all aspects of society. So, it becomes a tool for the writers in portraying the society they live in or their life experiences through the characters and settings presented in their works. Likewise, Indian women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Meena Kandasamy, and Shobhaa De who comes up with their own unique way of delineating different aspects of life, especially women. They sketched their characters and settings in such a way that the readers can connect them with real life. The voices of the women characters become the voice of 'Every women', whose voices are unheard by the society. In that way, they fit into the subaltern group of

people in the society as well as in the institution of marriage. The women writers bring in a situation where the women characters are in between their 'Self' and society.

Shobha De, one of the prolific Indian feminist writers who have contributed to Indian writing in English has a unique way of portraying the characters in her works. Almost all the settings of her works are in Bombay which deals with the middle class or upper social strata. She mainly deals with the theme of discontentment in married life, wherein the female protagonist will either walk away from the marriage or stay in the marriage. Through her works, she vehemently despises the denying of the

women to live and act freely without artifice. De's *Second Thought* mirror Maya's journey into the profound region of the self where she suppressed her true selfhood.

In the prologue, we are introduced to the main character Maya who enters in an arranged marriage with Ranjan when she was still pursuing her studies. Though she protests for the marriage her parents ignored it because her mother, Chitra felt that Ranjan might find pretty girls of Bombay, "Ranjan is quite a catch. Who knows, by the time we get to Bombay, some other lucky girl might have grabbed him" (De. 3). This shows that Maya's marriage was not based on compatibility nor affection rather it was based on the prospect to grab the groom, who has a foreign degree and with a wealthy background.

Maya started to lose her self identity when her mother suggested wearing yellow saree for the rendezvous so that she will look fairer and impressed the Maliks. She was worried about her daughter's dark complexion for her proposal since Maya's maternal uncle Prodipda told that "Maliks are all very fair. They certainly wouldn't want a dark daughter-in-law" (De. 4). The complexion of a woman becomes important especially when it comes to marriage. To have fair complexion becomes a necessity for women and so she finds an alternate way to get a fairer skin, in that way she is compelled to cover her authenticity by an artificial means such as by using various cosmetics and bright colour dresses. In the case of Maya, we see that she was suggested by her mother to wear yellow saree to look pretty and fairer even though she was comfortable with her skin tone, rich golden brown. For her mother, the matter of complexion was very serious since the complexion denotes the background, prosperity, class, upbringing and position in the society. Perhaps, all these ideas are social construct through which society gives an identity to a person.

Maya's mother was very nervous thinking about how the Maliks will react to her daughter as they set out for Malik's residence; whether they will accept her daughter or not because her brother told her that, "I am told by my neighbors that Maliks have

interviewed ninety-nine girls and rejected all of them. The boy wants to set a record, it seems, and score a century, like Sachin Tendulkar" (6). This meeting was more like an entrance for a job because of the pressure that has been expressed by Maya's mother. Simone de Beauvoir in her masterpiece text *Second Sex* stated that "she is taught that to please, she must try to please, must make herself object; she must, therefore, renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a living doll and freedom is denied to her" (305). Chitra makes all efforts to present her daughter in an attractive manner so that she will please the Maliks. In doing so, Maya's self-identity as an individual falls into a commodity wherein her self is being compromised and that she must present herself in such a way that the Maliks will get impressed by her.

Harriet Taylor in her *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) argued for the desirability of women to work outside the home in order to be partners rather than servants of their husbands. (Mahanta. 17) In the *Second Thought*, Maya wishes to work in a big textile mill in Bombay since she was a trained textile designer. However, when Chitra talks about career, "These days both people have to work if they want to live well" (11) Mrs Malik raised one of her eyebrow indicating her disapproval. Maya's thought of working in textile industry becomes a mere fantasy when Ranjan also shows his dislike about the idea of his wife working outside the home. Ranjan declared, "But in my case, I am earning well enough to support a wife and family. I believe it is a woman's duty to run a good home. And then, turning directly to Maya, he had asked in a challenging sort of voice. Would you agree with that?" (11) Maya was trained in the textile and that she was keen on pursuing a career after she gets married. However, her career collapses even before she dreams. Her dream started to falls apart. She felt dejected by such marginalizing remark. "How could they tell me not to work after marriage? Do any educated, trained girls stay at home these days? I didn't like the remark" (14). But Maya was silenced by her mother, and that silence continues throughout her married life and it intensifies her agony and bit by bit it tears her 'Self'.

Maya was locked in matrimony that does not satisfy her. Her quest for selfhood turns topsy-turvy. After she gets married to Ranjan she felt that she was being colonized. There was an absence of belongingness. Ranjan would not take her out to make her feel that she is now Bombaywali neither would he let her mingle with the other women folks of Bombay. He would only command her "Don't you ever get out of the house?" (17). The way Ranjan behave towards her was not like a husband treating his wife. It was more like treating a servant. It was he who manages the money, in fact almost all. He would not allow Maya to use S.T.D phone, air-condition and television too. Maya becomes a submissive partner, who lived under a decent roof with a family name.

Ranjan was sexually impotent and so he did not feel sexually aroused. Maya never feels wanted in the bedroom because he let her feel that the bedroom is his and that the kitchen is hers. Ranjan tried to show his manliness to hide his impotence. He would pinpoint minor things and makes it very serious. He says, "Concentrate on keeping your house neat instead of gallivanting with these useless women" (78). Maya is trapped in a dry monotonous marginalized married life. Simone De Beauvoir view that-

Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repletion: the clean becomes soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present... Eating, sleeping, cleaning – the years no longer rise up towards heaven, they lay spread out ahead, grey and identical. The battle against dust and dirt is never won.

In the patriarchal society, a woman's interest, desires and aspiration are not important because there is a concept that being a woman she has to shoulder the domestic chores only. In the life of Maya, we find that there were no jaunt, no warmth nor any intimacy developed with Ranjan even though they are newly wedded couple. There was no feeling of oneness or belongingness. Maya tries her

best to adjust to the moods and strangeness of her husband. However, he never tries to understand her. In this depressing state of Maya, she met Nikhil, a college-going student. She takes refuge in the company of Nikhil who was impressive, frank and give compliments which bloom her dull life. She recalls Nikhil's comment: "You look like a beautiful garden today" (45)

In Manju Kapur's *A Married Women*, Astha had an extramarital affair with Pip since her husband was so busy that he gets less time for his wife. Similarly, in De's *Second Thought* Maya started an extramarital affair because her husband did not reciprocate to her. She started to share small things to Nikhil and enjoy his companion. Maya stated that "I like having Nikhil around. I felt good with him" (204). Maya felt her sense of being for the first time after she gets married when Ranjan was away from home for ten days. She says that "Ranjan was my husband. I was supposed to love him, respect him, miss him. And all I was feeling at that moment was relief at his absence" (228). Maya felt relieved, free from being judged, scolded and instruction. She opens her arms to Nikhil and involves in lovemaking, she forgets herself. "I felt beautiful"(392) Maya started an illicit relation with Nikhil but later she learns about Nikhil's engagement from his mother. She was broken into pieces. Her dream shattered again by a man.

Ranjan kept Maya in confined in the four walls of the kitchen. He locks the out-station phone facility before leaving for the trip because of his rigid attitude in giving economic freedom to her. He gives a thousand rupees for her saying not to spend more than fifty rupees a day. He himself makes her very brief calls that too issuing her certain instructions and he does not seems to ask her how she is and if she misses him or not. She had expected tender words of love from her husband but it was not so. Ranjan fails to fulfill both emotional and physical love.

Of all the unfulfilled wishes as a wife she learns to accept as it is when she remembers her mother saying "The issue is, Maya, marriage involves sacrifice. And all the sacrificing has to be undertaken by a woman. The sooner you accept that, the

happier you'll be" (277). Maya remains with her husband and in a way, she sacrifices her own identity to fulfill the societal norms as a wife. She loses her identity completely when she accepts the condition of sacrifice her as a wife. Perhaps, it is an irony that, on her part, she sacrifices for the sake of familial but she was not treated as a wife by her husband. She was not given her basic needs as a wife, but as a wife she was given in charge to take care of the domestic chores and eventually she forgets her dream to be a textile designer. In spite of her high marks in school and her training in the textile industry, all go in vain.

Second Thought delineates a profound conflict of a woman Maya who suffered in a domestic chronicle. De projected the life of women who are ignored by her husband. Maya's marriage with Ranjan fails to bring happiness yet she decided to stay with him to make a new beginning in their marriage life.

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