Life if not a sweet dream but a bitter reality: A Study on Shobha De’s ‘Maya’ in Second Thoughts

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Abstract:
The Discussion on Feminine Identity has huge significance in the present day society. Many social scientists talk about the identity of women in every walk of life. The most importance change in the society started with influence of Western Education, Liberalization of women Urbanization, and influence of cosmopolitan industrialization. These influences made Indian women to look into the better life from rural areas to urban industrial areas. The system of combined families transformed into nuclear families. Materialism, antagonism in economic issues and so many other lead to illicit sex contacts, separation and extra marital relations. In the cross roads of this type of atmosphere, the question of women and her identity became a debate among the society. As a result, there are so many movements in the society raised the voices like Feminism, women empowerment and so on. It reflected in the writings of women describing the situations and circumstance that lead women to resort for such decision in the present day society. Shobha De stands first among them who raised strongly the voice of women. My paper titled “Life is not a sweet dream but a bitter reality: A study on Shobha De’s ‘Maya’ in “Second Thoughts” studies the character of Maya and how her dreams became bitter in her life.

Key Words: Feminine identity, life, society, influence, western civilization

Shobha De’s three novels Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights and snapshots mirror the changed social realities of the lives of the Upper class women in Metropolitan cities. The majority of her characters strive for feminine identity through protest and defiance. They fight for the liberation from the clutches of male dominated society. Unfortunately at the end, they embrace the patriarchal culture. The conflict between identity and submissiveness take lead throughout the novels and place before the society the situation for discussion. The protagonists yearn for the female autonomy frustrates the quest for selfhood. Shobha De discusses the problems of women in patriarchal society, man-woman relationship, lesbian and homosexual relationship and the emergence of live-in relationship. Through her novels, she makes her readers to introspect about fast fading love, pleasure and satisfaction in martial relations. She became as the symbol of highlighting different perspectives of woman's freedom and liberation. She conceives the extra-marital affairs of women as the stroke to break the traditional and moral values in society. Her women are daring and courageous in establishing extra-marital affairs to satisfy their natural urge. These women are not hesitant in using sex as calculated strategy to get social and financial benefit. Marriage for them is an insurance against social values. Her novels can be thematically classified into three
groups: firstly, Socialite Evenings and Second Thoughts are the novels that deal with the themes such as Family, Marriage, Patriarchy, quest for Identity, struggle for survival and marginality. Secondly, Starry Nights, Sisters and Strange Obsession (1992) move around the life in film industry, Bollywood and concentrate basically on lust and sex. And finally, the novels Sultry Days (1994) and Snapshots (1995) present them anticipation of women and project the ultra-modern lifestyle of neo-rich people. Her fiction portrays the contemporary reality of the rich elite people. She delves deep into the hearts of the people and exposes the reality to the world without aiming to harm anyone. She is straight forward and talks with guts and fearlessness focusing her work to rule out the dangers developing in the society and to bring the awareness in the society. An alliance with a man grants a woman heterosexual privileges, many of which are redefined by the law; religion and families. But, the woman has to pay its price at her own cost, since she has to destroy herself, her voice, intellect, and personal development, for a man’s need, in these alliances. Thus, Shobha De rejects compulsory heterosexuality and suggests woman to woman relation or lesbianism is better than man to woman relationship, which she has depicted in her novels. She also refuses to participate in the game of competition for man. She confronts her own sexuality and challenges the norms placed upon her by culture or society.

“Second Thoughts” (1996) is the seventh novel of Shobha De. It describes the agony of Maya, who feels trapped in matrimony. She a middle class Bengali girl in Calcutta wanted to move to Bombay to escape her dull life. But she found herself trapped by an arranged marriage to Ranjan who was highly conservative and completely indifferent to her desires. She became utterly lonely. At this time she was acquainted to Nikhil, a charming college going boy and a tale of love and betrayal started. She was neglected and criticized by her husband. In course of time she was also exploited and deceived by her lover. So she remained a silent sufferer. She was unable to find happiness and satisfaction within marriage and her extra-marital relation also made her utterly frustrated. The novel shows the novelist’s insight into human nature. It represents psychic-cum-social complexities of middle class society. Maya, a textile designer with a dream of becoming a journalist came to Bombay to meet Ranjan Malik with a marriage proposal. Maya was an attractive young girl with warm and rich golden brown skin tone, gleaming jet black hair and large dark eyes. Maya was more fascinated and in love with Bombay. When she met Ranjan, she was more excited at the prospect of settling in Bombay, the city of her dreams. “Marrying Ranjan would make her a part of it immediately- Maya knew she’d be bonded with Bombay forever.” Ranjan was a workaholic, brilliant person with a charming personality. He had thick dark hair, intense large eyes, strong chest and muscular shoulders. He had a degree from America and had a good post in a bank. He was a traditional, orthodox person who thought. “It is a woman’s duty to run a good home.” Mrs.Malik and Ranjan did not approve of working women. Maya’s uncle also supported them by saying that “In an
Indian family, the husband’s comforts always come first. Everything else follows.” Maya also belonged to a traditional family where a girl has inferior status and her education, career, ambitions, desires and dreams are of secondary importance. She is not free to take any decision of her life. After marriage whether she should pursue education, do a job or be a home-maker is completely decided by her husband. That’s why even though Ranjan and his mother disapprove of Maya’s being a career woman, no one in Maya’s family objected. Not even Maya as for Maya marrying Ranjan was like marrying Bombay. Maya thought that she was “the luckiest girl to get a foreign educated, Bombay based bridegroom”. But her newlywed life started with unsuccessful and depressed honey moon. Ranjan was never comfortable with any woman. He was sexually impotent. In the presence of a wife as ravishing and captivating as Maya, Ranjan did not feel sexually aroused even once, and to hide his impotency, he demonstrated his power over Maya in different ways. Maya asked Ranjan about his lack in sexual urges. But Ranjan reacted very strongly.

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

Maya was utterly pained due to Ranjan’s loveless attitude. He provided Maya nothing more than financial support, a decent house to live in and four square meals a day. In bed, they have been brothers, or sisters or flat mates. Because he was devoid of any passion Ranjan constantly reminded Maya of her duties as a married woman. And surprisingly at the same time, he used to forget his duties towards her. He never missed a single chance to criticize her. Due to loneliness, lack of physical satisfaction, monotonous routine and emptiness in her married life, Maya was dragged towards Nikhil’s magnetic personality. While enjoying life with Nikhil she also felt a kind of guilt that she was betraying Ranjan. She realized that it was wrong for a married woman to go out with a man and deceive her husband. But at the same time, she tried to console herself by saying that it is not at all a sin to go out and breathe fresh air. The novelist wants to show that the suffering, the agony of marriage and the long silence that will remain forever in the lives of so many Indian women who accept marriage as fate traditionally sanctioned to them. Maya is a representative. Even though woman like Maya will try to break the silence, she will have to return once again in the stifling atmosphere of marriage. Life is not a sweet dream but a harsh and bitter reality which a woman has to suffer silently. Maya has no option but to suffer the loneliness in her life. Maya wanted to assert her own identity, she wanted to be aggressive against the hypocritical standards of society but her silent scream stuck somewhere in her throat, unable to push its way out. The novel projects the psyche of Indian married woman caught and crushed between tradition and nature. The novel not only focuses on the hollowness of Indian marriage but also the hypocrisy and deception in extra-marital relationship which cannot be an option to marriage.
Maya’s silent cry for true companionship always remains unheard. The novel also exposes the nature of men. For Ranjan, there was no existence of Maya and for Nikhil, Maya was only an object to be enjoyed sexually.

References: