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Role of patriarchy in gender socialization of women in Shobha De's *'Second Thoughts'*

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Abstract
Gender is a system of social practices which creates and maintains gender distinctions and organizes human relationships on the basis of such distinctions. Gender is an artifact of social, cultural and psychological factors which are attained during the process of socialization of an individual. Family plays the most constructive role among such agents in the child's socialization. It is a social institution which is a brewery for the childhood conditioning. In a patriarchal family, girls and boys are raised differently and trained differently in terms of their behaviour, habits, clothes, attitudes and even games. Young girls are conditioned to adhere to their secondary status in a family. What begins in infancy continues through the years. Marriage, which is the most significant institution in an individual's life, is equally oppressive for women like their childhood. Girls are not encouraged to pursue higher studies and achieve an economically empowered state because marriage is reinforced as their destiny. These issues have been raised by one of the contemporary women writers like Shobha De in her novel *Second Thoughts*. De expresses the innermost desires of modern women who are brought up in a conservative environment but gradually emerge as enlightened women with strong views.

Keywords Women, Gender, Conditioning, Marriage, Patriarchy and empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Gender as a term is an analytical category to draw a line of demarcation between the biological sex differences and the way these are used to define the personalities of the two sexes. It is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and it is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Thus, hierarchies in all realms of life are often expressed in terms of gender, with dominant individuals described in masculine terms and dependent ones in feminine. The biological sexes are structured, represented and channeled into different roles in various cultural ways. "Categorizing males and females into social roles creates binaries in which individuals feel they have to be at one end of a linear spectrum and must identify themselves as man or woman" (Malhotra 16). Gender connotes that roles, capabilities, responsibilities and behaviour of the two sexes are different due to their biological differences. Thus, gender is culturally constructed. The process of gender discrimination begins from infancy, where a male child is preferred by the parents as compared with the girl child. This desire of a son is evident in almost every culture, as a son is considered as an asset who continues the family lineage and provides an economic and caring support to his parents, especially in their old age. A daughter, however, is perceived as a liability who is born to serve the interests of her husband and his family. Certain religions like Hinduism, propagates the presence of a son as necessary in a family, as it is believed that until a son performs the death rites of the parents, their soul can never rest in peace .This preferential treatment to boys is further continued in the form of the childhood social conditioning in the family where, "male-behaviour and characteristics are central and are the norm" (Kramarae and Dale Spender 59). Women in a gendered society are conditioned to be homely, meek, caring and completely devoted to the domestic work and family.

Till date, a woman's long stranding child-rearing role has tied her to her motherhood role as her prime role in a society and men are not encouraged to share this responsibility. On the other hand the, 'masculine' traits as prescribed by the patriarchal society, conditions men to be assertive, competitive, aggressive, a breadwinner and rational. 'Masculinity', has other dimensions too as it also includes a fixed attitude towards women in terms of a sexual object, weak and fit for domination in a family and society. 'Gender socialization' is a process by which children are conditioned to learn their 'masculine' or 'feminine' roles and thus, confirm their gender roles. Judith Butler in her work, Gender Trouble observes that, "Gender reality is created through sustained social performances…" (141). This socialization begins the

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moment, a child is born in a family and from then affects all the aspects of his life including his self-concept, social attitudes and inter-personal relationships.

Marriage, which is the most significant institution in an individual's life, held sacred by many religions, is equally oppressive for women like their childhood. It is still a common notion held by the male-hegemonic society, that a daughter must be married off as early as possible as her destiny is limited to marriage and motherhood. Many a times, marriage is thrust upon a woman by the parents, without knowing her preferences.

Shobha De shares a sharp understanding of the contemporary women issues and gender issues. She seems to question the gender roles of both the sexes, that appear in her novels as oppressive for women. De probes deep into the female psychology while portraying them in her novels. There is indignation in her novels, against the good old image of women who could never live their life on their own way. Women in her novels are represented as rebellious individuals who challenge the social taboos. De expresses the innermost desires of modern women who are brought up in a conservative environment but gradually emerge as enlightened women with strong views. These women struggle to fit themselves in the shiny version of the globalization. De's interest in modern woman's life and her everyday problems make the presence of the feminist perspective an essential part of her fiction.

The present paper studies and explore the gender issues, as projected by Shobha De in her novel *Second Thoughts* which begins with the social and cultural gendered socialization of both the sexes, where girls are conditioned by their mothers to adhere to their feminine nature, aim for marriage as their destiny than economic empowerment. Marriage is reinforced as a vital aspect of women's life than education by the mothers to their daughters, who unwillingly accept it under the family pressure. They are given no freedom to exercise their choice in deciding about the time and the man to get married to. In Indian patriarchal families, girls are conditioned to get the approval of the elders in a family in all the matters related to their life as compared to the boys, who are often not questioned about their decisions. The major gender issues in her novels emerging after marriage focuses on the adjustment problems of women, where they deny to accept their subservient status and demand equality and liberty in their relationship and assert to

establish their identity by being economically empowered. The women articulate their demand from their husbands to share the family responsibilities and childrearing too. The girls in a Indian patriarchal family are trained by the mothers to learn the household work like cooking, washing, knitting and cleaning the house, which is considered vital for them to get married." Hence, the young daughter's socialization is designed to equip her for the demands of her adult roles as a wife and daughter in law" (Assay and, et.al 68). The boys, however are not encouraged to learn these works as they are trained to be the bread-winners, whose responsibility is to earn and support the family.

Shobha De has projected the social conditioning of girls in the Indian society, according to the patriarchal norms, which affects the all round development of girls throughout their lives. The female protagonist Maya in *Second Thoughts* is socially conditioned and groomed into the customs and the rituals that reinforce her secondary and subservient identity. She is trained to uphold the feminine traits of care, self-sacrifice, nurturing and motherhood. This social conditioning of girls in the Indian society, according to the patriarchal norms, affects the all round development of girls throughout their lives. Shobha De in *Second Thoughts* has also portrayed the theme of social conditioning of women in the early childhood, where Chitra, constantly reminds her daughter, Maya to aim for marriage as her destiny and not her career. Chitra besides conditioning Maya into her gendered role is extremely concerned about her dusky complexion and instructs her to wear the colours that do not make her look more dark. She tries to mould her daughter according to her own personality, who prioritized marriage and adjusted well in her marriage. Sudhir Kakkar observes, "Mother's unconsciousness identification with her daughter is normally stronger than with her son" (60-61). Shobha De has projected a mother's anxiety over her daughter's complexion which suggests that during the adolescence of the daughter, a mother besides grooming her daughter into the traditional values is equally concerned about her physical attributes as both are the pre-requisites for a girl to get married. When Maya attains her puberty, Chitra instructs Maya to preserve her chastity as it is an asset for a woman to get married and during her adolescence, she even stops hugging her daughter, that makes Maya conscious of her growing stage. Shobha De, through this gendered conditioning seems to suggest that, since childhood, a young girl is made conscious of her physical

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attributes as a means to attain a good husband because of the patriarchal stereotype that only beautiful women are desired by men in marriage. The negative effects of gender conditioning often results in the sense of inferiority complex in young girls who begin assessing their potentialities in terms of their physical attributes only and devalue their intelligence.

The Indian patriarchal families have always conditioned their daughters to prioritize marriage and motherhood in their lives than attaining the higher education or career first. The boys in the same family, however are given liberty to pursue their higher education first than getting married as they are groomed to be the breadwinners and be self-reliant first to take the marital responsibilities, unlike the daughters who are conditioned to be the home-makers. This biased attitude towards the female education is still evident in many urban educated families, where a girl, while pursuing her studies is often married in between, when the parents come across a suitable match. The girl is convinced by the parents by reinforcing marriage as a social compulsion in the Indian society and the bright prospects of the boy and his family. The girl, therefore, agrees to get married and often it becomes impossible for her to pursue her studies after marriage, due to the marital responsibilities. Education for women has an imperative character for individual growth and an educated woman plays a crucial role in the family and social development. An educated woman can perform her responsibilities well as a wife, be a guide to her children and teach them and can offer suggestions to her husband in job-related matters. Marriage of a daughter in India is of a prime concern to her parents than her education and economic empowerment, therefore, a girl often does not have many options to exercise than to accept marriage as their end goal. The gender difference in the Indian families is also evident in the form of choices given to boys and girls. Girls are often urged to marry, the moment parents receive a good proposal for her as compared to the boys in the same family who are given more liberty in getting married to the girl of their wish. It is also a common notion held by many people that a girl who gets married early is able to adjust well in marriage than a mature girl and believe that, "The adjustment before twenty five becomes easier" (Sinha 77).   In *Second Thoughts*, Shobha De has projected a society where a girl has no freedom to exercise her choice in selecting a man of her own choice and deciding about the time to get married. Maya's mother, gets delighted on getting a matrimonial proposal for Maya from a rich family, settled in Bombay. Chitra compels Maya to get married to the man selected by her and accompany her to Bombay, as the man and his family wish to see the girl first. Maya, however being an educated and assertive woman resents the marriage proposal and argues with her mother, "An arranged marriage? For me? Don't be ridiculous. Besides I have one more year to go before I finish my college" (4). Maya is keen to accomplish herself as a Textile Designer first but her mother becomes an obstacle to fulfill her dreams. Maya though argues with her mother but eventually complies with her wish and agrees to go to Bombay and with her mother and uncle to meet the man selected by her mother, Ranjan.

On reaching Bombay, Chitra picks up a yellow sari for Maya and instructs her, "Think fair and you'll look fair. Wear yellow for the meeting…. They certainly wouldn't want a dark daughter-in-law" (5). De has projected a very significant scene, where the families of both the girl and the boy are introduced to each other by Maya's uncle. He introduces Maya to Ranajn and his family, "Our Maya is very talented. She can always use her training to do something from the house itself…. In any Indian family, the husband's comforts always come first. Everything else follows" (15). Maya, however is keen to complete her Textile Engineering degree after marriage and when she expresses her wish, it is disapproved by Mrs. Malik, Ranjan's mother. She says, "Career? What kind of career? (14). Betty Friedan in her *Feminine Mystique* observes that in a patriarchal society, education and career are considered only male prerogatives and women are constantly reminded that, " Truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights, the independence and the opportunities" (13). Through this discussion Shobha De hints at another aspect of the patriarchal society, that men are the breadwinners is still the norm that lives on every society and women before marriage are reminded of their responsibility towards household work. There is a cultural stereotype that an empowered woman is less feminine. "Thus, modernization has transformed Indian life in many ways but obviously it has not altered the Indian perceptions of family and family values radically" (Subramaniam and M. Gayathiri 4). When Maya's mother notices that her daughter's intervention in the middle of their conversation has annoyed Mrs. Malik, she convinces her and says, " Don't worry, Maya is used to housework.

On weekends she refuses to let me enter in the kitchen" (13).

Maya's marriage with Ranjan is eventually fixed with the efforts of her mother who convinces Mrs. Chitra by giving false impression about her daughter's traditional image. Shobha De has illuminated the traditional mind set of mothers, where they never educate and accomplish their daughters as economically empowered individuals first and to decide on their own about the time and the man they wish to spent their lives with. The daughters are considered as a liability to be married off soon by every possible way. Maya on reaching back home confronts her mother and refuses to get married to Ranjan and argues "How could they tell me not to work after marriage? Educated, trained girls stay at home these days? I din't like that remark" (18). Maya is very articulate in pronouncing her views related to marriage as she is an educated woman who values her self –respect and liberty. Shobha De's women break their silence as, "Silence is a symbol of oppression, while liberation is speaking out, making contact. Contact is what matters" (Cameron 7). Maya no matter resists and quarrels with her mother but eventually succumbs to her mother's desire to marry Ranjan.

Shobha De further projects the marital status of Maya after she settles down in her new home. A woman is defined as the *Ardhangini* , emphasizing the oneness with her husband but till date she is a subservient partner in marriage in India. A girl is conditioned by her parents, especially her mother at the time of her wedding that her husband's house is her home now and she has to adjust in her in-laws and keep them happy. Ironically, men are never conditioned with such words at the time of the wedding because the patriarchal families always expect a newly married woman to adjust in their family and accept their family norms. Maya in *Second Thoughts* after marriage, begins her life with a hope that as her husband has studied abroad, therefore, must be modern in his outlook towards women, however, her illusion fails when he makes it clear to Maya that as a husband he demands complete devotion from her towards him, his mother and home. De seems to question the patriarchal values and gender roles where a newly married woman is expected to only think of her husband and family and ignore and suppress her emotions. Ranjan as a husband not only reminds her of the wifely responsibilities but even encroaches upon her freedom and disapproves of her movements in the locality. Once, he questions her directly," I hope you aren't gallivanting around during the day…. This isn't Calcutta. I suggest you stay at home. If you want to go anywhere, ask my mother to accompany you" (37).

In Indian culture, individualism and rebelliousness have always remained alien ideas for women. Women have merely existed as subjected to patriarchal system. Maya begins feeling extreme loneliness and states, "I busied myself in the kitchen and maintained a non-committal silence. Somehow, the thought of discovering Bombay through my mother-in-law's eyes didn't appeal to me" (37). Ranjan devotes all his time to his job and his mother. He never cares for the desires of his wife, who wishes nothing except his time. Once, when she discusses her wish to spend time with him, he reminds her of focusing on her household responsibilities first.

Maya one day when complains about their lack of time being spent together, Ranjan rebukes her, "A man comes home to relax after struggling all day. He looks forward to a hot bath, a hot meal, soothing conversation. Not this rubbish" (41). He suggests various ways to Maya to overcome her boredom like listening to music, watching television, reading and cleaning the house. Maya thinks one day, "Ranjan baffled me. He was someone who was so completely self-absorbed that I often wondered whether he had actually ever seen me" (58). Maya, since her marriage wishes to see all the beautiful places in Bombay as it is a new place for her and when she asks him to take her out, he turns her request down and says, " Sometimes you talk like such a kid. Life isn't a picnic, you know. And you aren't in Bombay on a holiday" (38). Maya, one day asks Ranjan to keep a servant to do all the household works as, she does not have any time left for her. When he hears her demand, he at once insults her, "Didn't you do housework at your mother's house? Don't tell me you've forgotten already? (6). De seems to suggest that men like Ranjan perceive their wives as servants because they are conditioned throughout their lives to be the bread-winners and look down upon women as mere care takers of the house. Maya eventually accepts the truth that both she and Ranjan married each other for wrong reasons, where he married her to please his mother and she married him to settle in Bombay. Shobha De observes," Marriage is worth only if you think so, not otherwise. You have to believe in marriage. If you don't, or if you think of it as a career often, then you're better off staying alone. I hate using the word' compromise'…"(Mishra 169).

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By the time it is clear to Maya that now and forever, she will have a loveless life, spent in utter loneliness. The union of mutual love of a man and a woman tied in a knot has no signs in her life. Maya, therefore, adjusts with her present state. Shobha De observes, "Marry because you want to marry. Because you believe in it. Because you wish to share your life someone you care about. Only then will that marriage survive and thrive"(5). More than half of the world's population is made up of women but she is still not treated at par with men despite innumerable revolutions. Her individual self has very little recognition, therefore, for many women like Maya self-effacement becomes a normal way of life. In male centered ethnic societies, the women usually remain on the margins, invisible, mute, constricted to limited stereotyped roles. Maya in an order to avoid any bitter arguments with Ranjan succumbs to his wish and devotes all her time to family and home. However, overtly, she accepts dominance over her but inwardly she desires to break free all the rules that enslaves her and feels deeply insulted on being viewed as a mere appendage and not a complete human being. This forced adherence to femininity leads to nothing but subversive annihilation of a woman's self.

De does not seem to reject marriage but her prime concern is that it should provide mutual love, care and security. Her novels bring out the power of patriarchal hold on the mindset of the people, who propagate the secondary status of women. Her women are 'new women', who are educated, aware, articulate their desires and bold enough to challenge the gender norms:

Men seem very passive in respect to women. They are indifferent or insensitive, unwilling or unable to take action or to accept responsibility for the way things turn out. Though in the Indian male dominated society women are marginalized by their husbands, but

Shobha De's women are certainly different.(Naikar 208).

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