MAN - WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN ‘SECOND THOUGHTS’

The theme of man – woman relationship seems of particular interests to Shobha De. She writes on this theme. De shows the psychology of both man and woman in her novels.

Here we are dealing with man - woman relationship in the novel ‘SECOND THOUGHTS’ (1996). We are dealing both relationships — Men relation with women and women relation with men.

The narrator of the novel is the female protagonist Maya. ‘Second thoughts’ is an,

“explosive tale of love and betrayal.”1
at the surface level and the “hollowness and hypocrisy”. Ranjan, Maya and Nikhil are the main characters around whom the story in the novel revolves. Maya, in order to escape her dull, middle-class home in Calcutta, she marries Ranjan and plunges into the ‘Whirl of Bombay’ Maya, though determined to be an ideal wife discovers herself stifled by the confines of an arranged marriage. Although the man (Ranjan) she marries has all the glamour of an “American degree” and a “wealthy family” background, yet he is completely indifferent to her desires. Experiencing utter loneliness of a stranger in Bombay, she begins an explosive extramarital affair with Nikhil, a young college — going neighbour. The novel ends on a note of bitterness.
This particular novel is woven around Man–Woman relationship. The story depicts over-bearing female characters and weak male characters. It exposes the male ego, social pretences and public facades.

Ranjan and Maya are incompatible for each other. They are not made for each other. A couple of examples will illustrate this. The advent of seasons excites Maya. On the onset of winter she, ‘rushed to the balcony and took a few rapid deep breath’, finding that “the air smelled different and there was a thin grey veil draped over the city” (138). Ranjan, however, lacks such a sensuous love of life. Even on being promoted, he curtly says that “that’s pollution, not mist” (139) Maya loves music and the rhythmic life of Bombay. Ranjan, on the contrary, complains about the “jarring sound” of a popular filmi song and
wonders how “civilized people” can spend their precious time “Watching such nonsense” (30).

Maya and Ranjan are so incompatible in their attitude that every sensual advance from Maya’s side meets with a prosaic, practical and hard response from Ranjan. When Maya wants love from Ranjan, he “inched away” from her, saying that he was tired and that, “a man needs some rest and peace after a hectic tour” (260). Maya longed to attract the attention of her husband but Ranjan was so self-centered that he hardly had any time for her. Maya sadly finds him out “So completely self-absorbed that she often wondered whether he had actually even seen her” (42). She asks: “Didn’t husbands share pleasant nothings with wives?”(207). Maya’s silent cry for true companionship for herself always remains unheard.
The hollowness of such relationship is evident even in the case of Maya’s parents, who “hardly ever talked to each other” and even their “quarrels or heated arguments were out of question” (70). Maya’s own case is far more pitiable. She and her husband are not made for each other. She painfully realizes:

Now here we were,

locked together in a relationship

that didn’t satisfy either of us.

He very obviously longed to be on his own,

leading the life he had become so accustomed to as a student, and then as a promising bank executive

living by himself. And I longed for the perfect romantic companion. (252).
Ranjan’s presence around was a matter of unhappiness for her, and “his exit always generated a sense of exhilaration” in her. With him around she would “hold her breath” (92). The whole of the novel Ranjan behaves like an instructor of Maya not her husband. Maya’s feelings and desire had no matter to him. Ranjan is too much conservative. Once Maya asked Ranjan, ‘Do I have to work? I do have a degree, in textile designing, after all. Ranjan snorted dismissively, “A Job? In Bombay? You have to be good ... great ... brilliant... to get a job here. People don’t waste time on nobodies” (28). He added angrily, “That’s enough Maya. No more nonsense. How can any intelligent person be lonely? In a city like Bombay. at that? There’s music, Television. You can read, clean the house, write to your parents. What’s the point of complaining all the time?” (29 – 30).
Then Maya began to think, “how conservative he was.” He is the man who thinks of his own – self and his works.

On the other hand, Nikhil Verma, Maya’s fourth floor neighbour is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Verma, is quite different from Ranjan. Nikhil is a college – going student. He is no more than eighteen or nineteen, Nikhil has a very happy – go – lucky nature. He always smiles. In the words of Maya,

*A smile is so unexpected that*  
*it transformed his feature*  
*almost miraculously and made*  
*him look like warrior leading*  
*a victory parade.* (17)
He is quite different from Ranjan. Ranjan is conservative and narrow-minded. On the other hand Nikhil is a modern youngman. Both are good-looking but Nikhil is endowed with “his confidence” and “polished behaviour.” Ranjan is conservative while Nikhil is ‘Bindass’ in all deeds. Maya feels good in the company of Nikhil. She thinks that she has an existence in his company. Nikhil will all that anyone had imagined Bombay’s youngmen to be good-looking, confident, sporty, cocky, flirtatious, lazy, spoilt and quite, quite irresistible. Ranjan is not like that Maya wants but unfortunately Nikhil is not her husband. There was not any love – making in the relationship of Maya and Ranjan. That’s why she was dying to feel such type of romantic relationship, dying to feel whatever she imagined in her life. Ranjan always only fill – up t this relationship. No love – talks
between husband and wife. That’s why maya attracts towards Nikhil who give everything that Maya wants. In the company of Nikhil she fells like a free bird. We can’t imagine how conservative Ranjan was. Once he had presented Maya with a copy of Swami Vivekananda’s life, adding, “This helped me a lot when I was in America with daily temptations to distract me. May be it will help you too” (88). Once Nikhil said to Maya, “Come on, I’ll treat you to some bhel.” Nikhil had urged, taking Maya lightly by the elbow. Maya had pulled away quickly with a, ‘No-o-o, I have to go back, I still didn’t – couldn’t – move, Finally, in my smallest, silliest voice, I had whispered, ‘I .... I can’t. My husband won’t like it. Nikhil had exploded, ‘What? I don’t believe it. Are you saying your husband has forbidden you from eating bhel?”(90). Maya had been far too embarrassed to
explain, once Nikhil said to Maya, “Like you manage everything else? In silent suffering? Come off it, Maya. Act real. Get real. It’s no big deal to ask someone for help, you know. It’s not considered shameful.”

Nikhil says Maya, ‘Don’t worry. I don’t want to complicate your life or make you unhappy.’

He was always perfectly at ease—confident, relaxed and interested in a way that went beyond polite curiosity.

But after all, Nikhil is a man. He can’t go without man’s strong instincts or passions. He supports Maya just because he loves Maya and wants to get Maya and have sex relationship with Maya.

Thus we can say, Nikhil’s “nonchalant” attitude makes Maya wonder, “whether he takes anything
seriously at all.”(172) Ranjan is a weak, oedipal man whose complex drives him to become, “a man who really didn’t need marriage, romance or sex.”(286) He himself confesses: “It has been difficult for me to get into relationship with any woman.”(51) Ranjan is rigidly conservative in respect of the role of a husband and wife. Nikhil however, is quite liberal. He feels: “Each person should be free to do whatever he or she wants to” (169). Nikhil has been presented as a foil to highlight the short-comings in Ranjan’s personality, which were chiefly responsible for Maya’s predicament.

Thus De’ novel SECOND THOUGHTS shows us that good relationship depends on mutual understanding, love and devotion. If these three things are not there would certainly an explosion that
destroys every relationship. Maya and Ranjan just dragging their life. Their marriage is disillusion only. Extra - marital relationship is there but Maya is not responsible for this. This relationship portrayes the view-point of modern man and conservative man.