



A Woman's Journey from Traditional to Modern: A Study of Preeti Shenoy's *The Secret Wish List*

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Abstract

English Literature has an important role in numerous professional and personal shifts in women's lives. The advent of feminism in India can be attributed to prominent Indian women writers who wrote in English, such as Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandeya, Arundathi Roy, Chitra Banerjee, Anita Desai and others. These writers present a realistic image of contemporary society. Several societal problems, including the dowry system, partition, child maltreatment and child employment, were intended to be brought to the readers' attention by these authors. They also uncovered issues like women's education, child marriage, complex man-woman relationships and maltreatment given to women in a patriarchal society. The same pattern is still being followed by contemporary women authors who depict modern women through their novels. Of them, Preeti Shenoy is the shining one. She portrays the modern woman of today's society through her various novels. The narrative of *The Secret Wish List* centers on 'Diksha', a contemporary woman. She is initially a traditional woman but one day because of her friend she realizes her hopes and aspirations. Though it seems impossible for her to achieve all of her ambitions at first, she encounters numerous obstacles because of a variety of situations, but ultimately, she succeeds. This paper aims to analyse the novel through the lens of portraying a woman's life journey from traditional to modern.

Keywords – feminism, shifts, realistic image, maltreatment, modern women

Preeti Shenoy is a multi-faceted postmodernist in Indian English literature. At various foreign literary festivals, such as those in Birmingham, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah, Preeti was a representative of India. All of her written works exhibit an unrestrained flow of feeling that attracts her readers. She has a talent for using words and images to create enchantment. Shenoy's works represent a variety of themes like human

relationships, the young generation, woman empowerment, love relationships, marriage and culture. Her literary works explore the experiences of youthful women who frequently face social and family constraints. Her novels, such as *Life Is What You Make It* (2011), *The Secret Wish List* (2012), *Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake* (2012), *The One You Can Not Have*, (2013), *It Happens for a Reason* (2014) and *The Rule Breakers* (2018) have won praise from readers all around the world for their remarkable depictions of female characters. Shenoy has won the hearts of female readers all around with her skill in developing unique and captivating characters. She discusses women's personal identities and unique qualities. The women in her novels are a classic example of the concept of the modern woman. An online website describes a modern woman in today's society. The modern woman says:

“Fuck the social norms of what a woman should or shouldn't be.” I am a woman, and there's nothing you can do about it. I am strong, courageous, and powerful, and I am not going to take it anymore. I stand beside the millions of women in history who have redefined what a woman is. And not what society wants us to be. Hear us roar (<https://collective.world/this-is-what-it-really-means-to-be-a-modern-day-woman/>).

The modern woman is represented by Shenoy as a brave and determined one who is prepared to take courageous steps to proclaim her self-reliance and fight for her freedom rather than as reliant, subservient, disappointed or traditional. Preeti Shenoy's depiction of today's woman in her novels is representative of the complexity of her present-day existence and the myriad experiences she has to deal with in life. Shenoy has inspired women to reject the conventional image of women and stand up for their liberties via her artistic endeavours; which made her a reform icon. Her fictional personas encompass a wide spectrum of contemporary female characters, each of whom encounters distinct obstacles in their everyday lives such as homemakers, single mothers and ambitious businesswomen.

The Indian woman with integrity and inner strength has successfully paved her way traversing through exploitation and discrimination. Preeti Shenoy's novels aptly capture the above idea. She has presented this idea in her novels through her representation of the modern woman as an independent, strong personality so that numerous women all across the globe have been motivated to take responsibility for their existence and pursue their objectives and dreams. This notion of womanhood encompasses all her female characters. They are ardent, unwavering, fearless and unaffected by outside forces. They also possess the necessary abilities to triumph in any circumstance.

Preeti Shenoy's famous novel *The Secret Wish List* (2012) talks about a young woman who is bound by tradition and afterwards cries out for her freedom. It highlighted the predicament of a woman living under social and familial restrictions. Diksha, the main character, is an ordinary housewife who is content with her status as a housewife and has no complaints against anyone. Following its opening narratives, *The Secret Wish List* goes into the past in which Diksha is a young beautiful girl with ambition. She is positive, enthusiastic and passionate about her life. She has dreams and fun with her friends; she is preoccupied with her studies and has no slight idea of the brutal truths of life. Her entire existence abruptly transforms after an incident. She is attracted to Ankit, her brother's friend. she tries to communicate with Ankit about her interest in him but every time she fails and holds all of her feelings inside. She used to confide in Vibha, her

closest friend, about her emotions.

Later on, Ankit developed feelings for Diksha as well. Despite all the restrictions; they both kept meeting together because they knew that no one would approve of their relationship. But one day they are caught together and after that, the family places Diksha under many limitations. The biggest limitation is that she is asked to stop her education. Despite being a bright and hardworking girl deserving of a bright future, social pressures forced her to give up on her education. Preeti Shenoy used the persona of Diksha to depict the existence of a woman in a culture where men predominate. In a patriarchy, people believe that women cannot be trusted to make life choices; instead, men make these choices on their behalf.

Diksha was also forced to marry at the age of nineteen. The marriage decision completely altered her outlook on life. Following her marriage with Sandeep, Diksha is carrying out all of her obligations as a committed wife. Both of them have a son named Abhay. Sandeep and Diksha merely fulfil their marital responsibilities but there is no love or closeness in their marriage. She believes that “Ours is a conventional Indian marriage. And good Indian wives don't do things like that” (Shenoy 28). Here Preeti Shenoy describes the dull lives that married women lead in Indian society. Their spouse and other family members have imposed numerous limits and constraints on them. Diksha describes her marriage as “I know that there is only one word which sums up my marriage perfectly: Boring” (Shenoy 27).

At the same time, Shenoy depicts Vibha, Diksha's friend as an independent, self-assured, brave and joyful lady, who embodies the quintessential present-day contemporary working woman. She exudes the soul of a modern-day emancipated lady and leads her life the way she desires. When Diksha meets Vibha, she realizes how boring her life is. Vibha realized Sandeep was a controlling, egotistical and self-absorbed individual who didn't even give any consideration to Diksha's mental health and happiness. On the contrary, Diksha finds that Vibha was working and travelling to the locations she desired, having a contented, cheerful, and joyful existence. Diksha felt unhappy and dissatisfied with her existence and she had been living such a boring life for the last few years. Diksha's perspective on life changed because of Vibha and she began to moan, albeit in a subservient voice. Vibha points out, “We all must live our lives; we should do what makes us happy. I kept pushing myself in my career, as I wanted to prove that I was as good as any man” (Shenoy 74).

Upon learning of the death of Vibha's husband, Diksha begs Sandeep to allow her to travel to Hyderabad so, at this difficult time, she can comfort Vibha, but he refuses to listen. He forbids her from going to see her friend giving her foolish excuses. Here Shenoy expresses the powerlessness, annoyance, fury and aggravation of an Indian woman in traditional culture. Diksha is shocked to realize how inconsiderate her husband is. She says, “I feel angry. The person closest to me, someone who is almost like my sister, has lost her husband and he is more bothered about his presentation and about Abhay” (Shenoy 65).

As a modern woman, she decides to succeed in all of her endeavours. Diksha overcame numerous obstacles to meet Vibha. She maintained her determination and faith and she was now resolved to give her own life a new purpose. she made a move forward but maintained her ties to her base of principles. She now decides to fulfil her secret wishes because she realizes that apart from being a wife and mother, she is also a

human being. she discovered herself. She decided to raise her voice against the bad treatment given to her by her husband. Diksha left her sad past behind and started a new life. Diksha and Vibha are the characters who never give up but instead face life's challenges, Shenoy has been effective in capturing the nuances of the contemporary woman of today's society through these characters. According to a LinkedIn survey, success for a modern woman---

First comes career, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage. For nearly three-quarters of women (74%) worldwide, this is the order in which they measure accomplishment. Over the years, however, the female mindset is changing from housewife to boardroom member, as women in the workplace seek to have it all in life – continuing to climb the corporate ladder with family in tow (<http://www.salon.com/2013/09/11/>).

Today's woman is the new woman who can construct her universe and make the finest possible decisions for it. In the present situation, modern women have numerous significant duties to perform in their lives. She can successfully handle every duty given to her. She takes pride in being unique. The contemporary woman enjoys every moment of her life. This is the road they choose to follow to achieve success. Diksha, the protagonist, presented by Shenoy, leaves her marital relationship behind to pursue her aspiration of becoming a professional dancer. On the contrary, Vibha decides to resign from the job for her children. It means that both ladies undertook the necessary modifications in their lives to make their lives satisfied. These are the positive changes to follow the lifestyles they had envisioned. They adjust their life to fit the evolving temporal context. Diksha aptly describes her mother-in-law. "She is truly modern, my mother-in-law. She is so practical and correct in her thinking" (Shenoy 81).

Thus, the modern woman is a self-assured woman who can communicate and accomplish her dreams. In the novel *The Secret Wish List*, Diksha leads the life of a typical housewife in the beginning but after she realizes her true self, she changes her attitude toward life and in this process, she has the support of her mother-in-law and Vibha. Her mother-in-law is also the best example of the modern woman who accepts the changes and acts according to them. Nobody seems to be concerned that the woman is also a human being and she is also having her desires, which she wants to fulfil. The modern woman does not shirk her responsibilities at all. She fulfils her traditional responsibilities well but at the same time, she also thinks about her rights. When her rights are denied to her, she rebels and seizes them. The modern woman has the perfect balance between her professional and personal life. She is not someone who is career-oriented rather she is truly content with her life. She has changed her image from self-sacrificing to a self-expressing woman. Preeti Shenoy is a female writer who presents revolutionary characters through her novels and she is also an adept analyst of female characters. The wishes, hopes, romance, anger, isolation and contentment that are portrayed in Shenoy's writings can be related to any Indian woman.

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