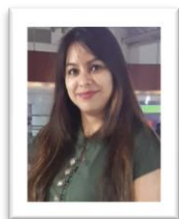


The Plight of Women in Preeti Shenoy's Novel 'The Secret Wish List'

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Abstract

Preeti Shenoy's works have touched millions of hearts. The objective of this research paper is to focus upon the plight of women in the novel 'The Secret Wish list' written by Preeti Shenoy. In her novels, she represents the problems of women providing their solutions through her characters. She is one amongst the bestselling authors in India. She has an art to weave magic with her words and pictures. She believes that women have equal rights to demand, for equality in society, as men. Her female protagonists are neither dominant, nor submissive; they are neither strong nor weak hearted; they are realistic. 'The Secret Wish List' is a story of protagonist 'Diksha'. She decides to complete her secret wishes. Her friend Vibha encourages her to do whatever she likes that makes her happy. Initially, she faces so many hurdles due to varied circumstances and understands that she won't be able to fulfill all her wishes as they don't seem possible to be accomplished but in the end she conquers. In this novel, Shenoy wants to inspire women to fix their goals. Vibha seems to be the mouthpiece of Preeti Shenoy, it is evident through what all she explains to her friend Diksha;

"Can you change the past? No, you can't. Your future is in your hands. Our hands. We need goals. Write down yours. No matter how crazy they seem or how unachievable. Do you have anything to lose by doing so?" (77) The Secret Wish list

Keywords: Plight of Women, Married Life, Individuality and Identity, Hope, life, The Secret Wish.

Introduction

The age that we live in is proudly considered as one of the progressive and glorious time by so many people. We feel pride in tagging our time as modern, advanced, developed and best that has ever been experienced. Today, the speakers, thinkers and philosophers talk about women empowerment, gender equality, progressive and independent women. Undoubtedly, growth and development in their lives can be seen, but there exists another side of coin as well. The age that we so fondly cherish is also, tinted with the dark and gloomy shades of women's conditions.

Literature seems to be an apt response to the dilemma. It also provides a suggestion. Literature deals about fiction and reality altogether and provides an opportunity to examine things in a keen way, which can be seen in the novels of Preeti Shenoy. Her novels capture the realities of contemporary life, both in the pleasant and the unpleasant way.

Preeti Shenoy is an Indian author. She is a rock-star of Indian publishing house. She is popular in Indian popular - fiction. She was born on 21st December in 1971 in Pune, now she lives in Bangalore. She has made her place amongst the top five highest selling authors in India, and highest selling woman author. Her works have been translated into many languages. She is known for her work in the romantic genre. She is known as an extremely down – to – earth person who has been reading and writing since her childhood. She has always had a natural flow with words. Her books are liked by many people, especially by women. She kick started her writing career with '34 bubblegum and Candies' which received good response from readers. She advises all aspiring writers to read and write more.

Shenoy has been consistently nominated for the Forbes list of the 100 most influential celebrities in India since 2013. She was honored with 'Indian of the year award' by Brands Academy. She has also received Business excellence award instituted by New Delhi Management Institute. India Today calls her *"the only woman in the highest selling league alluding*

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to the immense popularity of her books." She was a keynote speaker at Birmingham literature Festival, where the covers of *A Hundred Little Flames* were also released. During her school years, Preeti Shenoy studied in Kendriya Vidyalayas all over India. As a child, she liked to read, write, paint and drew pictures.

Aim of the Study

This research paper is about analyzing the conditions of women in 21st century. This novel is in simple narration; in spite of it, it is imbued with serious purposes. Various women's issues, like search for identity and individuality, conventional and boring Indian marriages, an ideology of traditional and modern women, loveless married life, compromises done by women in several situations and solutions to fix their so called targets in life etc have been talked about in her novels. This study will help in coming out with what and how shall women put efforts to work out with the crisis of their lives so as to become more and more happy and successful in their lives.

Review of Literature:

To carry out the investigation, the related research work in the field of women writers has been studied. Besides research papers, articles and text books upon Preeti Shenoy's works as mentioned in the bibliography, *The Dark Room: A Critical Study* by Prof. G. Vaidyanathan and *A voice of Seismic Shift in Indian English Fiction* by Beena Agarwal are some books reviewed for the investigation. Reading pulp fiction of the writers like Durjoy Dutta, Ravindra Singh and Chetan Bhagat etc. contributed in establishing the foundation of the research.

India Today calls her "*the only woman in the highest-selling league*;" She is not only an author but also a nature lover, blogger and keen observer. She is bestseller author.

Daily news and Analysis has described her as a "*Keenly observant mind*" and

The Times of India describes her writings as "*excellent storytelling skills*." She is not only a bestseller novelist but also most popular author. As, Cosmopolitan has mentioned her as "*One of India's most popular authors*."

Search for Identity and Individuality in women: In the novel '*The Secret Wish List*' Preeti Shenoy talks about identity and individuality of women. She portrays pain bearing, in the hearts of women. Here are descriptions about identity and individuality, because when Diksha thinks about past life, she says to herself; "*I have played the role of wife and mother to perfection. So much so that I have forgotten what I want as an individual. My identity is truly Sandeep's wife or Abhay's mother.*"(16) *The Secret Wish List*

Shenoy talks about awareness of women in 21st century. Diksha is a housewife and a mother, but hearing her friend Vibha, she is aware about her ambitions. She wants to fulfill her dreams. She is not satisfied being a housewife and a mother. As some words are mentioned here about her ambition; "*I know I want something more from my life. I want to do something about it. But what? I really don't know.*"(16) *The Secret Wish List*

In present scenario, women have everything at home mostly but not freedom and self- fulfillment. They desire to be self-dependent. They are not fully interested in family matters. There are some lines by narrator, who is the protagonist Diksha, "*I have everything, yet I have nothing. And I have no idea what I am going to do.*" (16) *The Secret Wish List*

Shenoy conveys the condition of boring and irritating life of women. Diksha says about her husband "*his request for tea too have begun to irk me. Vibha is right. They do treat me like a maid. I never get to read the newspaper in the morning. These years, it is he who reads it first.*"(26-27) *The Secret Wish List*

In this way it can be said that women are equal, it seems purported so much but reality is somewhat different.

Conventional Indian Marriages: In this novel, Shenoy represents various negative aspects of conventional Indian marriages, she tells about boring life of women after marriages. Because, they have a busy schedule, so many restrictions and limitations by husband and other family members can be observed. They have to almost serve like maid servants to their husbands but not like a life partner. Their husbands are indifferent to them. The protagonist, Diksha feels boring life after marriage, she says; "*I know there is only one word which sums up my marriage perfectly, 'Boring'.*"(27) *The Secret Wish List* In this novel Diksha, the main character thinks that "*Ours is a conventional Indian marriage. And good Indian wives don't do things like that.*"(28) *The Secret Wish List*

Preeti Shenoy talks about the anger in women, who are not so interested in the service of family members, because they are aware about their existence. Diksha is in rage to clean table to put away her husband's plate. She says, "*I clench my fists. I know I am working myself up into a rage. I feel like exploding now.*" (28) *The Secret Wish List*.

Diksha is in rage, talking to herself, "*Which century are you struck in, Diksha? Go on and tell him you need to talk.*" (28) *The Secret Wish List*

In conventional Indian marriages, women are not so happy because they face so many issues; they are bound to thrive for the happiness of husband and other family members. Everything is far more important than the wellness, wishes and desires of a wife. Preeti Shenoy represents the so called happiness of a wife through Diksha "*Fact is, he never promised to make you happy, Diksha. It was never about you. It was always about him. You were content then. You agreed, knowing what you were getting into. You have made your bed, now lie in it.*" (29) *The Secret Wish List*

A Contrast between conventional and modern woman: As the title suggests '*The Secret Wish List*', a major theme of this novel has a list which is full of secret aspirations. A woman wants to fulfill her dreams but is trapped in traditional society. Vibha enjoys the modern, western goods and visiting various places. However, Diksha is not enjoying all those things. Diksha's struggle is with identity. She is very much there as the part of Indian society and also

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as a part of the country, but knows actually very limited things.

Diksha and Vibha are two friends. Preeti Shenoy describes the life of both the women. They have dissimilar life-styles. Vibha is not like a maidservant like Diksha. She is independent. She can go from one place to another independently. She has servants in her house. She takes decisions according to herself. Diksha doesn't relish any of these luxuries. She is a part and parcel of an arranged marriage wherein Diksha says, "circumstances were not similar for both of us, but both had ultimately bowed down to parental pressure in the great Indian marriage system and had arranged marriages, the much earlier than her." (28-29) *The Secret Wish List*

It cannot be ignored that the condition of women is improving, but dark side of their lives can also be seen. When Vibha, who is an independent, modern and a working lady visits Bangalore, for a company project; she stays with her friend Diksha. There she happens to observe Diksha's routine several times and says to her, "Diksha, which century are you living in, girl? Look at what you have turned into. You have totally metamorphosed into a maidservant and cook." (9) *The Secret Wish List*

Here a contrast between conventional and modern women can be seen. Author remarks about the lives of those ladies, who are totally involved in household affairs. In response Diksha says to Vibha about her life, "Shut up, Vibha, I don't have a high-flying job like you, where your company sends you on fancy trips and all. I am just a housewife, and has it ever occurred to you that I like making hot food for Abhay and Sandeep?" (9) *The Secret Wish List*

Here frustration of those wives who are living conventional lives can be seen through the character of Diksha. She is frustrated as she is not getting any opportunity to complete her education and due to an early marriage by her parental pressure, she couldn't complete it before marriage even. Author wants to highlight the bitter reality that many girls inspite of being talented miss their fair chances to think about making their careers being in conventional families even in 21st century. Shenoy also portrays the life of educated and independent women through the character of Vibha to present the difference between both, one educated and the other who couldn't complete her education and got engaged into responsibilities. Diksha says about the life of Vibha, "She has a job she enjoys, has good help at home, is independent and smart in contrast of dependent woman, everything I am not. So I turn away and busy myself doing the dishes." (11) *The Secret Wish List*

Loneliness, frustration and feelings of being unloved in women: Preeti Shenoy is a keen observer of women's situations. She describes each and every moment of women's lives keenly. She tells about loneliness, frustration and their feelings. In the novel 'The Secret Wish List', Shenoy tells about existence of women, in the minds of their husbands in a positive and negative ways. Due to these negative feelings, they feel trapped in Indian families and societies. One example can be seen in this novel; Vibha calls Diksha to inform about the death of her husband (Mohan).

When Diksha hears this sad news, she asks her husband to let her go to Hyderabad so that she can console her friend at such crucial time, but her husband ignores everything. He possessing a very insensitive attitude asks about his son's school activities and his own presentation etc. He does not let her go to visit her friend. Through the character of Diksha, Shenoy shows the helplessness, irritation, anger and frustration of Indian women in some conservative societies; "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." (65) *The Secret Wish List*

Loneliness of Indian housewives is also shown in this novel. Diksha is in shock to see insensitivity of her husband, when he does not talk while she is struggling with problems and issues rather prefers to sleep. This makes her feel so unattended and uncared; completely neglected and not at all being treated as a family member or a human being. Late at night she feels extreme lonely and she says "The only 'friends' I have, are the mothers of the children in Abhay's class. And I am not that close to them that I can call them late in the night for a chat." (65) *The Secret Wish List*. Diksha has no love, no romance, and no enjoyment in her married life. She feels loveless life. She feels no existence except a mother and a wife. Diksha tells about her condition after conversation with Sandeep, "I retreat into the kitchen and I sob and sob, even as Sandeep turns the television back on and goes back to watching whatever it was that I interrupted." (33) *The Secret Wish List*

Many a times, Indian women feel badly neglected. Diksha describes to Vibha a situation where she asks her husband to spend weekend in a different way and how she is being treated on that expectation of hers, "When I had first suggested going out somewhere nice in the early years of marriages. Sandeep had glared at me like I had said I wanted to separate him from his mother." (10-11) *The Secret Wish List*

It is very obvious through these lines that not all women but most of them are living loveless married lives in so many ways. They want to enjoy with their families but they are not being understood. They are generally being taken for granted. What to talk about their independent careers, they are not even able to enjoy a little in their present roles.

Compromise of women in every situation: Preeti Shenoy almost in her every novel presents the reality of hell lot of compromises being made by women in so many situations. Diksha, The protagonist of this novel is frustrated, angry and unsatisfied. Above everything she can't get away from her circumstances because she is dependent upon her husband. In spite of all these hurdles, she wants to make herself believe that she is satisfied, she doesn't need anything more. She replies her friend with words that bring a real surprise when Vibha questions about her married life. Diksha says, "Vibha, I am happy. I am happy that my mother-in-law lives close by and we get to visit her. Abhay loves spending time

with her. Not everyone is like you. I don't have to get Sandeep to make coffee for me in the name of women's liberation or whatever. He learns well, he provides us with material comfort and so it is indeed okay if I am the one taking care of cooking and everything else."(10) *The Secret Wish List*

Irrespective of the fact that she internally is not doing great but is compromising at every step so as to keep her mind stable to feel that she is satisfied. She even says to Vibha, *"I am not entirely happy in my marriage. But I have made peace with my situation and I do not know how to change it. Sandeep is not a bad guy after all."* (11) *The Secret Wish List's* author wants to convey here that due to society, due to family pressure, some girls compromise with every condition unwillingly. Sexual harassment with women is also portrayed beautifully in this novel. Shenoy presents the life of such men, who are sexually involved with women but do not have any love. They are great to get their physical needs fulfilled, keeping aside what their women actually want. They only understand the comfort, requirements and desires of their own but nothing about their partners. Diksha is actually living a real boring life. She feels no love towards Sandeep but is playing a role of a dutiful life. She hates to get into sexual activity with Sandeep, but thinks that it is her duty so doesn't give voice to her feelings. Author comments about sexual harassment *"here in India, where people hush up even rape and do not speak about it, how do things like 'marital rape' even stand a chance to be discussed. Fact is, I have sex with Sandeep. But I do my duty as a wife."*(62) *The Secret Wish List*

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to bring forward plight of women in the novel *'The Secret Wish List'* by Preeti Shenoy that honored her with the title of 'a writer of women'. It can be said that Preeti Shenoy is a women author, who is a keen observer of women characters, and is mostly liked by women and teenagers. Her style is very simple. The fictional art of Preeti Shenoy has become a class in itself and has brought her success as a bestseller author. It has given a new direction to the stream of Indian English fiction to livelier. Shenoy's works touches everyone as if the readers are connected this way or that way to her works. Any Indian women can relate with their aspirations, dreams, love, frustration and loneliness that is being depicted in the novels of Shenoy. In this novel *'The Secret Wish List'* Shenoy explores the lives of women in different ways like traditional and modern way. Undoubtedly, she gets a huge success in bringing the painful life's pictures across that she wanted to.

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