



THE PURSUIT OF SELF-FULFILMENT IN PREETI SHENOY'S THE SECRET WISH LIST: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Kishor N. Mahajan¹ and Shriram G. Gahane²

¹Dept. of English, DrAmbedkarCollege, of Arts Commerce & Science, Chandrapur

²Dept. of English Adarsh Arts and Commerce College, Desaiganj, Dist. Gadchiroli

*Corresponding Author: kishormahajan17@gmail.com, shrigahane@gmail.com

Communicated : 20.12.2022

Revision : 12.01.2023
Accepted : 20.01.2023

Published: 30.01.2023

ABSTRACT:

Preeti Shenoy is widely regarded as one of the most acclaimed and influential female authors in the field of Indian English literature. Her writings stand out for their realistic depiction of women's subjugation in traditional Indian society. The protagonist in each of Preeti Shenoy's novels goes through a variety of trials, tribulations, frustrations, annoyances, suffering, and other emotional distress. To highlight the struggle of a woman to define and uphold her identity as a housewife, mother, and most crucially, a human being in the context of contemporary Indian culture is, in fact, Shenoy's principal concern. Shenoy depicts the struggle that women face in patriarchal societies to achieve an idealised version of feminine selfhood.

This paper explores the predicament of every contemporary woman who pursues selfhood and transformation in the novel of Preeti Shenoy, an influential and well-known Indian female author whose work is emblematic of modern women's search for self. Her female protagonists endure a harrowing ordeal before they are finally able to break free of oppressive norms and expectations. She's used a wide range of techniques to express the inner workings of a woman's mind and her deepest emotions. Diksha, the protagonist of Shenoy's *The Secret Wish List*, courageously fights against social norms and expectations to fulfil all her suppressed desires.

Key words: - *Self-fulfilment, Identity, contemporary women, feminist perspective, patriarchal dominance.*

Feminism is a critique of patriarchy, the social structure that creates and sustains gender-based power dynamics. Feminists believe that the patriarchal system has ensured that males have always had authority over women and relegated them to secondary roles. Feminism has long criticised patriarchal institutions like the state, the marketplace, the political system, and the family for its unfair treatment of women. Lalima Chakraverty, the author of *Works of Indian Subcontinent's Select Women Novelists* defines feminism as a critique of patriarchy, which she describes as "a male power that oppresses women through its social, political, and economic institutions," and feminism can be understood as a critique of this idea. (Chakraverty 56)

Preeti Shenoy's fourth novel, *The Secret Wish List*, was published in 2012. In this novel, Shenoy is primarily concerned with portraying

the female struggle for freedom of expression, identity, and autonomy in all its forms, including sexual, economic, social, and cultural yearnings. The central character, Diksha, is a 35-year-old woman whose life is portrayed in this novel from the viewpoint of the feminism and her desire for acceptance, expression, and fulfillment. Preeti Shenoy, in this novel explores the ways in which patriarchal authority breaches traditional morality to limit women's independence and the ability to make independent decisions so that they can live their lives.

Women in traditional Indian society are expected to take on the traditional role of obedient spouses, focusing solely on childbirth and housework. Due to the small mistake, she made as a child, Diksha is ill-equipped to adjust to life with the guy her parents have chosen for her. At the age of nineteen, she is mistreated by

her parents and brother and compelled to wed the insensitive upper-middle-class boy Sandeep, with whom she had a son named Abhay. Diksha is unhappy in her role as a housewife. The passage of time has turned her into a submissive and overly dependent woman who is afraid of her husband and continues to give in to his every demand.

According to Diksha, Sandeep is a cold and apathetic person who doesn't bother to find out what his wife wants. He is a callous, cruel individual whose only goal in life is to amass a large fortune. Diksha's husband, Sandeep, makes a solid living, and she could have utilised that money to improve their standard of living. Diksha's desire for affection stems from the inadequacy of his apparent concern for her well-being, which fills her with apprehension, uneasiness, and dissatisfaction. She wishes she could tell her husband that she often feels lonely, but she lacks the courage to do so due to their marital troubles. Sandeep is an insensitive individual who never considers the feelings and emotions of his wife.

Preeti Shenoy delves into the emotional distress that can arise from misunderstandings and a lack of open dialogue between spouses. Shenoy realistically depicts Diksha's battle with loneliness, despair, and mental emptiness. Diksha's rising discontent stems from her realisation that her life has no greater purpose. She feels like a puppet in her husband's hands as she sacrifices her own happiness and career for the betterment of her husband and children. Isolated, her feelings and desires have been smothered, causing her mental and psychological suffering. Diksha never has the courage to directly approach her spouse for what she needs. Whenever he walks through the door after a long day at the office, he goes straight to the TV or the phone, making it impossible for Diksha to talk to him until a

commercial break. Diksha is devastated by her husband's actions.

Shenoy portrays a bleak picture of the Indian married woman, showing how she has become helpless under male dominance and totally reliant on her husband. Diksha has become so assimilated into her husband's family that she no longer has a sense of who she is apart from him. Diksha's cousin Vibha tries to open her eyes by demonstrating the negative aspects of her life and the ways in which she has degraded herself in order to play the role of a good wife. She encourages Diksha to think critically about being a wife, which to her seems pointless. Vibha's visit to Diksha's home is a pivotal moment in her life and gives her the confidence she needs to defend her uniqueness. Diksha acknowledges that the shadow cast by her husband has diminished her sense of self, but she also acknowledges that escaping domesticity and pursuing her identity is not as simple as Vibha believes.

The abrupt realisation of Diksha's situation causes her to reevaluate her role as a devoted wife and motivates her to pursue interests outside of the home. In order to start her own life, she wishes to leave the monotony of her marriage. She freezes up in terror every time she attempts to discuss her professional life with Sandeep. The return of her childhood friend Tanu has helped Diksha come to terms with who she is as a person. When Tanu re-enters Diksha's life, she has come to believe that Diksha is content in her marriage and has achieved greater professional success than she has. On the other hand, Tanu is disappointed to learn that Diksha, after being married, has sacrificed her uniqueness to the responsibilities of housework. While Diksha feels like she has wasted her life after learning about Tanu's success in her career and her recognition as a woman who is both financially secure and single.

The woman fights back valiantly against her oppressors. The authoritarian nature of the woman's husband was the root cause of their marital difficulties. The oppressed person has no desire to continue being oppressed. The Modern Woman wants to be the focus of attention, so she justifies her preferences and aspirations. Diksha, too, comes to appreciate the value of being herself and makes the decision to validate her existence to the world. Vibha encourages Diksha to list down all her secret wishes and make it a mission to fulfill all those hidden desires. However, Diksha does manage to write down all of her secret wants and needs, which seems to shock her into awareness. In order to make up for a lost time, she plans to seize every opening now that she has finally made it. As soon as an idea strikes, she writes it down. Her secret wish list includes-

1. Take a vacation alone, without family but with a friend.
2. Go snorkelling
3. Get drunk
4. Learn Salsa.
5. Wear a bikini
6. Have a sex with a guy other than husband, just to know what it feels like.

Diksha decides to keep working through her list, marking off the first item that doesn't require help from anyone else. She gives thought to her husband Sandeep's reaction as well. Diksha listens to her gut instinct and calls the dance studio where she recently enrolled in a salsa class without getting worked up this time. Vibha compliments Diksha on her initiative in expressing interest in the salsa class. Since Sandeep would prevent Diksha from taking the salsa class, Vibha steps up to cover the fee. Diksha's mother-in-law is compassionate and encouraging. She established the tone for their relationship from the beginning and provided support and solace as she fumbled through the early stages of motherhood and

marriage. Fortunately, Tanu (who had been working in Gurgaon but had recently moved to Bangalore) reappeared in her life and informed her that Ankit had been trying to get in touch with her for a very long time. Diksha's mind and heart had to face the question of whether or not she actually wanted to meet him after their conversation. The resolution to the problem is the story's high point. At the novel's end, Diksha has developed into a very eloquent character. She develops self-assurance and learns to express herself. She finally stops being a doormat and takes control of her own life.

The author portrays Diksha as a person who wants pursue self-fulfilment by leaving her husband and expanding her horizons. As a result of this worry, she gives serious consideration to her most heartfelt aspirations, yet she is unable to fulfill any of them. Preeti Shenoy has transcended the traditional man-woman bond of marriage while portraying her protagonist as a contemporary woman. The notion of the subservient Indian lady is shattered by Diksha, a newly minted woman, with her outspoken, individualistic, and carefree view on life. The most astonishing and intriguing aspect of this new representation of womanhood is the woman's extraordinary levels of autonomy in practically every aspect of her existence. Diksha feels that she hasn't had a sexual encounter since she started seeing Ankit years ago. When she is with Ankit, it's as if a stunning "New Woman" is being born. Her top priority at this moment is having sex with this man. Diksha's growth and confidence as she breaks free from a loveless relationship shows how Shenoy significantly reimagines the traditional view of female morality and marital ethics. That chastity and loyalty are no longer criteria for morality seems to be an implication of her argument. She and Ankit's relationship may look like adultery, but she knows deep

down that it represents the "voice of society at large."

When a woman invests in learning more about and accepting her own identity, she has the strength to break free from limiting circumstances. She will be able to regain control of her life if she can figure out how to fix the issues she is currently encountering. Here, Preeti Shenoy goes deep into the mind of a woman, describing how Diksha eventually comes to understand her own needs and makes the decision to consciously act on those wishes. Her pursuit for self-fulfillment is ultimately satisfied when she is reunited with Ankit, who provides her with both mental and emotional contentment. This marks a turning point in her life. Diksha is able to finally indulge all of her deepest wants now that she is spending time with Ankit. She deviates from the traditional norms of social interaction and has an affair with Ankit when she realises that her husband does not encourage the development and satisfaction of her wants.

Diksha is shown as a self-aware "New Woman" who leans towards Ankit not because she lacks character, but rather because of circumstances and the negligence of her husband, which allows her to establish a relationship with Ankit. She establishes her business with the assistance of Ankit, and as a result, she becomes a financially independent woman. She confidently embraces her newfound independence and self-sufficiency, transforming herself into a "New Woman" in the process. After being silent for fifteen years, Diksha has, at long last, discovered how to express herself. Diksha ends her marriage and relocates with Ankit once she makes the decision to end it. Diksha and Gaurav, with Ankit's support, launch their own dance studio in their home. In this way, Diksha becomes a prosperous businesswoman, changing from a hapless housewife.

In conclusion, we are able to claim that Preeti Shenoy's work, *The Secret Wish List*, depicts a woman who is armed with feminist beliefs because of her strong desire to pursue what she wants and needs regardless of the diverse situations. Diksha has grown into a self-assured and fulfilled woman. She is the epitome of the modern woman who places herself at the forefront of her priorities and seeks to live her life for her own sense of fulfilment and accomplishment rather than for the approval of others.

REFERENCES :

- Shenoy, Preeti. *The Secret Wish List*. The Secret Wish List, Westland ltd, 2012.
- Chakraverty, Lalima. *Gender and Culture in the Works of Indian Subcontinent's Select Women Novelists*. New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers, 2012, p. 56.
- Usha, Sawhney, and Usha. "The Plight of Women in Preeti Shenoy's Novel "The Secret Wish List." *Anthology: The Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, pp. 6–9, www.socialresearchfoundation.com/upoadresearchpapers/7/366/2007310734421st%20usha.pdf. Accessed 21 Jan. 2023.
- Swapna, P Kalyani, and R Naga Dhana Lakshmi. "Heterogenous Woman Characters in the Novels of Preeti Shenoy." *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology*, vol. 17, no. 7, 12 Jan. 2020, pp. 9171–77, archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/3855. Accessed 21 Jan 2022.