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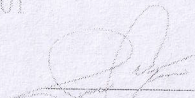
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PORTRAYAL OF NEW WOMAN IN THE NOVELS OF PREETI SHENOY: A
FEMINISTIC STUDY*

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Abstract

The term *New Woman* is an offshoot of feminism which was originated in the final decades of the 19th century in Europe and North America. It refers to an ideology which escalates the path of women's empowerment and emancipation by crossing the conventional barriers of society towards liberating oneself. Modern day women are concerned about their individual identity and economic independence and desire to lead their life on their own. The portrayal of the New Woman, her struggle and quest for an individual identity has become a popular trend in the Indian English literature which reveals the chain of women marching from tradition to modernity.

The present paper is a study of the portrayal of the New Woman in the selected novels of Preeti Shenoy. Shenoy portrays the image of New Indian woman who typically values the self-fulfillment, and who is always in search of self-identity and individuality rather than the rational image of the self-sacrifice. Shenoy in her novels shows a great insight in portraying the image of the modern educated women, their life style and psyche. Shenoy highlights the changes in the perspectives of the women about marriage and sexual relationship in the woman characters of her novels.

Keywords New Woman, Patriarchy, Marriage, Self-Identity, Empowerment, Liberation.

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The image of the New Woman is the presentation of the woman just opposite of the figures of the silent, submissive and virtuous old traditional woman. The New Woman is the woman who refuses the traditional marriage scenario and opts single and professional life instead. (Jusova, 1) The image of the New Woman is varied according to nation, society, class, age and cultural differences. This conception of the New Woman inspires many Indian women novelists to project the series of female figures in their novels who struggle for their evolution to come out from their domestic spheres.

Preeti Shenoy is an emerging and shining star of the literary sphere of Indian Writing in English. She has portrayed her women characters in her novels as an image of New Woman who rebel against the established patriarchal social set up to own their freedom and rights as a woman.




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The women characters in her novels are no longer conservative, oppressed or dependent who accept the life the way it comes to them; instead they wish to be independent and aspire to get what they dream about. The present paper aims to investigate elements of the New Woman in women characters of Preeti Shenoy's novels *Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake* (2012), *The Secret Wish List* (2012) and *The Rule Breakers* (2018).

Preeti Shenoy's novels are entirely about the women characters. Most of the stories of her novel deal with women as a protagonist who are born and brought up in the urban society. She strongly believes in women empowerment and thinks that women must have an equal right to demand for equality in society as men. Her characters, be it a college girl or a housewife, professional woman or a single mother, every character in her novel is an image of New Woman. Preeti Shenoy is a popular contemporary feminist writer, she opposes marriage as a mere institution in most of her works. She has shown her undeniable brilliance as modern thinker and writer with astonishing clarity. Her writing is characterized with the depiction of the degraded status of women and the crumbling social order viewed through the prism of feminist sensibility.

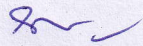
Preeti Shenoy explores the world of urban woman and regrets over the status of the women in society. In an interview she says, "I also see many advertisements where the women is still shown cooking, serving the family that waits around on the dining table; and then rushing to work where she effortlessly manages her job and home, and comes back with a smile on her face!" (Author's Corner With Preeti Shenoy, 2013). The women in almost all her novels are modern urban women who desire to live their life independent and aspire to get their individual status by challenging the socially established male hegemony. Nisha in *Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake*, Diksha in *The Secret Wish List* and Veda in *The Rule Breakers* all show tremendous confidence in taking up all the challenges come across in their life while attaining their desired goal.

In these novels, Shenoy presents protagonists who eventually find their place as a married women. In *Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake*, the protagonist Nisha is a 26 years old plump, plain looking girl. Shenoy describes her as a 'Plain Jane' because of her average appearance. At the age of five she loses her mother and also fails to have a caring father who considers her responsible for her mother's death. Nisha works in a travel agency where she gets close friends like Chetana and Akash who also work in the same agency. For her this job is above all else but she quits her job and marries to a wealthy businessman Sameer without knowing the consequences of marriage.

Diksha in *The Secret Wish List* also steps into new world of marriage and has a son whom she names Abhay. She is a timid house wife, who toils the entire day but is taken for granted. She is a meek doormat, a submissive and dependent wife who is scared of her husband. She could not even imagine expressing herself in front of him. Sandeep is workaholic, insensitive, selfish and cold husband who has no emotions. She longs for the love and care from her husband.

In the novel, *The Rule Breakers*, the protagonist Veda is a studious, quiet and obedient girl who harbors the dreams for her future. Veda desires to get education and make her career, she dreams to escape from Joshimath and gets a job as a lecturer in a college and wishes to work in a big city. But, her dream goes unheeded when her parents arrange her marriage at the age of twenty, even before




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the completion of her graduation. Veda discovers that she has no reason to escape from the marriage. These three women Nisha, Diksha and Veda get married at the early age and find themselves trapped in so called marriage institution. Simon de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1953) opines: "Marriage is the destiny offered to women by society." (Beauvoir, 445). In the case of these three women, it is evidently seen that they are forced to get married either by their parents or by the circumstances occurred in their life.

The New Woman believes that her dream of self-fulfillment in marriage cannot come true. Simon de Beauvoir opines that, "Whether the woman lives with her family or is married, her family will rarely show the same respect for her work as for a man's; they will impose duties and tasks on her and infringe on her liberty." (Beauvoir, 707) Nisha after marriage begins to get the restriction from Sameer as a husband. After quitting job, she becomes dependent on Sameer for everything. She merges her individual identity in the identity of her husband like most of the women do. Her dream of individuality has not come true and sums her failures as a course of married life. This kind of act from Sameer suggests the patriarchal dominance. Diksha being a girl is marginalized at home by her parents, this doubles her agony and demoralizes her. She dutifully marries a suitable boy and raises the child as dutiful mother. The gender discrimination is also grounded at Veda's home because her parents treat their son differently than their daughters. Her father monitors his son's progress at school like a hawk watching its prey while he never cares about academic performance of his daughters. Even after scoring goods marks, Veda and her sisters receive no praise, no applause.

Shenoy's women Nisha, Diksha and Veda are no longer submissive, docile or weak to accept the life the way it comes, instead they are bold and rebellious who protest against their exploitation and strive to earn their individuality. The novelist discusses the struggle of each woman for autonomy and respect as the equals of their male counterpart. Shenoy's women Nisha, Diksha and Veda realize that they cannot acquire individual freedom unless discarding the status as a married woman. Nisha, as a wife, adjusts everything except her pregnancy, when Sameer insists her to undergo abortion because he was not fond of children hence he doesn't want to become a committed father. Nisha denies the suggestion of Sameer and gives a birth to baby girl Tanya and then Rohit and handles everything like a single parent. He feels that Nisha doesn't give time to him and his sex-life has become totally non-existent. He finds no satisfaction in his role of husband and father and decides to break the marriage after eight years. Nisha finds herself in helpless entrapment but she decides to confront the situation solely and as a single woman redefines herself by earning her own living. She starts her own catering company and soon becomes famous in the city as an entrepreneur with support rendered by her friend Akash and her widow neighbor Mrs. Billimoria. Nisha adopts the life which is forced by Sameer and makes him feel jealous about her transformation.

Diksha too longs to step out of her boring married life to fulfill her secret wish list. She struggles to gain unlimited freedom and individuality with her husband. The independent and self-identity of her friend Tanu attracts Diksha which inspires her to change her life. Tanu asks Diksha to follow her heart's saying which make Diksha to write the list of her secret wishes. Diksha's mother-in-law is an understandable woman who renders her support and encourages her daughter-in-law to



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live her dream life. At the end of the novel Diksha turns out to be so expressive, she gains confidence and ultimately finds her voice to protest against her conservative husband and orthodox parents. She puts an end to her submissive nature and decides her future for herself. She realizes her own importance and starts living life as per her own choice. She attends salsa classes and comes in contact with her school friend Ankit. She fulfils all her secret wishes in the company of Ankit. Finally, when she selects Ankit as her second husband her parents are against of her choice. But, she is very stubborn and refuses the disapproval of her parents by taking Ankit's hand in her hand. Denying patriarchal dominance Diksha selects her way of leading an independent life. Shenoy by depicting Diksha as a New Woman gives the voice to the oppressed woman of the society who are being tormented on the name of marriage.

Veda's status as a married woman in *The Rule Breakers* takes on a new dimension by the desertion of her husband Bhuwan. In the course of the story, Veda finds herself in a particular situation of the marriage when she begins to get bad treatment from her mother-in-law, Padma Devi. The evil nature of her mother-in-law keeps her in the place of alienated soul of the home and she is shattered with the humiliation. Veda expects the help of Bhuwan but he too doesn't support her and takes the side of his mother. Veda once tries to express her grief on phone call to her parents but she is advised to adjust saying this is the common fact in everyone's life in the initial days of marriage. But sexual desertion and dissolution of her husband leads her into an extremely unhappy married life. She completely breaks down when she comes to know her husband's sexual leaning with his friend Vicky. Veda feels deceived and she finds herself drowning in a sea of emotions.

At the end of the novel, Veda realizes that her dream of self-fulfilment in marriage can never come true and she cannot acquire individual freedom without flying from her present state. She breaks the traditional rules of patriarchal mind set of the society and arrives on the decision to be separated from Bhuwan. She joins the NGO 'Sankalp' as a teacher where she meets a new friend, Ron and Kanika. Joining 'Sankalp' as assistant teacher, provides Veda a feeling of achievement that gives her solace. With the help of Ron and Kanika she launches her own new school 'The Rocket School' and moves into the same building of the school and stays alone in her new world. In her letter to Vidya, she expresses her happiness and ends the letter with the words saying, "When I think about it, I have lost Suraj and also lost Bhuwan. But I have found myself. That is priceless" (TRB, 320).

Thus, it is evidently seen in the novels of Preeti Shenoy that there is strong concern of New Woman. In these novels, Shenoy has portrayed the image of liberated and emancipated New Woman. It is observed that the women in her novels do not depend for their survival on their father, brother or husband, instead they solve their problem on their own and established their own identity by discarding the established patriarchal social set up. In her writing she has portrayed the women characters who resist against the marginalization, who reject marriage as mere an institution and who break the patriarchal barriers to emerge as an empowered New Woman.

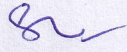



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