



Redefining Womanhood From The Pages Of Preeti Shenoy: A Critical Study

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BIO-NOTE

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ABSTRACT

Womanhood has been a topic of concern since the existence of society, the definition and prospect of which has been changing from time to time as per the changing society. Feminism and womanhood have been in limelight since the first wave of feminism in 1848. At that time, womanhood was said to have four major attributes: purity, piety, submissiveness and domesticity. However, with the development of society, and eventually with literacy and development of women, these four attributes changed in the modern period. The women of today are no longer naïve and submissive but are rather courageous and competing to be self-sufficient. They are emerging as much stronger personality physically, mentally, emotionally and economically in all spheres of life. Such womanhood has been redefined in the works of Preeti Shenoy which has been studied comprehensively and comparatively in the present research work. The prime focus of the present research work is to trace the attributes of womanhood in the present-day society through the pages of Preeti Shenoy.

Key-Words: Womanhood, purity, piety, submissiveness, domesticity, courageous, self-sufficient

LITERATURE REVIEW

“I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship.”^[1] This quote by the famous American novelist, Louisa May Alcott, seems fit best when woman and her womanhood is discussed. Ever since the existence of the society, women have been striving for a firm path to stand upon. She has not just been called by the term ‘Weaker Sex’ but even considered so by the patriarchal society which has made her loose equality with the other sex and consider herself weak and meek before them. They have been made and considered vulnerable since time immemorial. However, as is said, there is an equal and opposite reaction to every action, so is the case with this curbing of the female mass as well. The more they were considered weak, the more pressure built up within them to prove themselves and have a firm base for themselves in the society. This became possible due to the efforts of some notable women in the society, who kept challenging themselves every now and then and striving to prove themselves. As a result, the definition of womanhood kept changing from time to time and is still in the same progressive stage.

True Womanhood, when considered historically, has been defined in *The Cult of True Womanhood* by Barbara Welter, as a trait of having four main virtues: purity, piety, submissiveness and domesticity.^[2] This definition was in accordance with the society of nineteenth century. But with the development of society, the meaning of womanhood kept changing accordingly. Prior to the wake of feminism in 1848, women were confined to homes and domestication, were

considered naïve and shy and were ignorant of their potential and power. Feminism made them aware of their rights and potential. With the wake of feminism, women woke up in true sense and began to adopt attributes of themselves according to their own will and choices. In the twenty first century, human civilization has reached miles ahead and women are, if not equal, no inferior to men, be it physically, mentally, emotionally or economically. They have emerged courageous and strong with time, to match steps with their counter sex in all spheres of life.

INTRODUCTION

Womanhood has been a topic of interest and debate since time immemorial. Since the existence of the society, women and womanhood has been under deep consideration. Womanhood, from the beginning of the society to the present day, seems to have traversed a long path from root to zenith; from sati to reaching Mars, from being called the weaker sex to becoming an equal share holder in national development. Women ‘have shed their initial skin of weaker sex to transform into a strong personality.

Preeti Shenoy is a contemporary fiction writer who has risen to fame within a decade. She paints these strong women characters in her novels in all their present shades. She offers a collage of women existing in the present society in her literary works. She has penned females like Ankita, Vipasha, Trisha, Veda and Puja in her works who offer a deep understanding of womanhood of the present world, strong, defiant, smart and self-sufficient. She believes in the dictum of ‘Run the World’ instead of allowing to make you run.

Ankita is the protagonist of her mesmerizing novel of hope in life *Life is What You Make it*. She is a studious, ambitious and a happy-go-lucky teenager of the present society. She enjoys life to the fullest and prioritizes herself at every nook and corner. While in school, she is in love with Vaibhaw, but part ways when it was time for higher education. In the college, she meets another boy named Abhishek and falls for him. They develop a deep bond which affects the mental state of Abhi when time came for Ankita to move to another place for further studies and he commits suicide. This breaks Ankita from within and shatters her mental equilibrium leading her to bipolar disorder. She would have surrendered to the illness, had she no courage within herself. But she gains courage and fights the disease and becomes victorious, proving that women of today can bear any oddity in life and come out victorious. She is a stark contrast to the woman of twentieth century novel *Cry, The Peacock*, Maya. Maya is a woman of twentieth century, who was weaker than the contemporary woman. While Maya was longing for love from Gautama, her husband, and when she couldn’t receive her desired love from him, she became neurotic and ended her life. She was a dependent woman who wanted a male support in order to make herself live emotionally, mentally and physically. She was, like the female mass of the time, weak and timid. Neither could she live her life self dependently, nor could she make her man act in the way she liked. She is a typical woman of the time, suppressed and oppressed. But Ankita is more individualistic in nature, thus redefining womanhood from the woman of previous century like Maya. Ankita lives her life on her own terms and takes her decisions prioritizing herself. She is not on mercy of others, like Maya was on the mercy of Gautama. Rather, she is independent in her decisions and at once decides to go for her higher studies even if it meant parting ways with her beloved Abhishek. However, in this case it was not Ankita, but Abhishek who could not bear separation and ended his life. She even survived his suicide, though it affected her mental state for some time. However, she does not give up her life like Maya did after the death of Gautama. Rather, she fights her psychosis and resumes her normal life after some months of treatment, proving herself a brave woman of modern times. The four attributes of true women is, hereby, challenged and redefined by Preeti Shenoy.

Vipasha is the lead of the novel *It Happens for a Reason*. She is painted as a brave and smart lady of the present society who does not fear odds and adversities in life. She is a young rising model of the cinema world where she and Ankush meets and falls in love with each-other. They get into a serious relationship with each other and Vipasha gets pregnant at the peak of her career. She, however, choses her child above her career, but her dream world shatters when Ankush refuses to name and accept his child. In-fact he asks her to abort the child. “Look, Vee, you can’t screw up everything simply because you are too pig-headed to see the reality.”^[3] But, Vipasha was determined to have the baby to which she said “shut up Ankush. For me this thing growing inside me is what is real. It is a part of you. It is a part of what we shared. It is a gift. I don’t care what you think, I am having the baby.”^[4] She is bold enough to shoulder her responsibility, bolder than her male counterpart who denied accepting his responsibility. Vipasha, then, gives birth to the child and raises him up single handedly, facing all the toils of single parenting and parturing unmarried. The society curses such women and so is Vipasha its victim. She faces a great toil for raising his child in her work front as well but she comes out bold, setting up an example of courageous modern woman.

Veda, the protagonist of *The Rule Breakers* is another exemplary of modern woman who is bold and courageous rather than meek and timid. Women, in general society, are expected to finish education, find a good match and lead a household life submitting herself to the cause of husband and family. The *Cult of True Womanhood*, too, defined a true woman to possess the values of piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness. However, this pre-conceived notion of womanhood was changed by Veda in *The Rule Breakers*. Veda is the eldest of the three daughters of an orthodox middle-class family, whose father decides to get her married off to someone when she comes ‘of age’. Though, Veda was an ambitious and brilliant girl, her father asks her to get married with a suitable boy. Veda follows the ‘submissive’ quality of womanhood and surrenders her desires and ambitions for her father’s sake and gets married to Bhuvan. She, however, is not satisfied with her marriage with Bhuvan, rather gets devastated when she learns that her husband is a homosexual. She tries all her best to remain submissive but when the marriage did not go well, then she begins to carve her own niche. She begins working first with an NGO (Sankalp) with the help of a friend and then becomes a full-fledged social worker, bold and self-dependent, thus negating the need of a woman to surrender to any situation in life. She describes herself

bold and courageous, contradicting herself from the gender biased roles provided by the society, thereby raising the standard of womanhood. Shenoy justifies the words of Beyonce through her characters that the most alluring thing a woman can have is confidence.

CONCLUSION

Preeti Shenoy is a known name in the contemporary literary world. She basically writes about Indian family structure and reaches the woman mass at the extremes of our society. She, as a true writer, holds a mirror to the society which reflects how the female mass is considered in the society. All her novels deal with female mass defying all odds of the older days, thereby reflecting the attributes of modern womanhood. She has tried to shift attention towards the prevailing taboos in the society, which the women of today are opposing, rejecting, dismissing and ultimately come victorious. While Ankita takes no time to choose herself and her career when she was faced with a choice of either career or boyfriend, Vipasha breaks the social taboo of having kids without marriage by raising her son single handedly in the patriarchal society who was born out of wedlock. Veda, too, emerges strong when, after being submissive in marriage and to her father's will, she feels a void within herself and acknowledging it, she begins traversing her own path of career and success, leaving behind her family and eventually, a so-called attribute of true woman, domesticity. Shenoy's women champion the cause of women by their struggle, sacrifice and simulation. Thus, to conclude, it could be said that Preeti Shenoy has redefined womanhood in terms of courage, strength, self-direction, self-sufficiency, equality, power and success through the pages of her novels. Above all, Shenoy pens the idea that the future rests on women as they are the chief architects of prospective society.

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