



Short Communication

Conventional Versus Unconventional Characters in the novels of Preeti Shenoy

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the changeover of women characters from the stereotyped conventional women to unconventional due to certain family circumstances in their life. Preeti Shenoy's female protagonist also reflects such transformation in her novels. "Conventional characters provide a sense of familiarity and relatability for readers, allowing them to easily connect with the story and its themes. These characters often embody common archetypes and traits that readers can easily recognize and understand. On the other hand, unconventional characters challenge traditional norms and expectations, pushing the boundaries of storytelling and offering unique perspectives. These characters often defy stereotypes and offer fresh insights into the human condition, allowing readers to question societal norms and explore new ideas. By incorporating both conventional and unconventional characters, writers are able to create a dynamic and diverse cast that reflects the complexity of the real world. This combination allows for a more nuanced exploration of themes and issues, as well as a more engaging and thought-provoking reading experience. Conventional characters often adhere to traditional stereotypes or expectations, while unconventional characters challenge or defy these norms. All the traditional characters portrayed by Shenoy are meant to accept the reality where as the unconventional bound to deviate from all cultural norms.

Keywords: Stereotyped, traditional, transformation, conventional, unconventional.

Introduction

‘It is the monotony that gets to me. All I do is look after Ria and Reema, send them to school, go to the gym and work out, and then come back home. Vikram is never around. My life is always the same old routine. I think men have a button which gets activated the moment they become husbands..’¹

Preeti Shenoy, Indian women writer depicts the plight or misery of women folk through her protagonist. Majority of her novels are the replica of the society. The author has penned down several books such as ‘Life is What You Make It, The Nameless Relationship, Wake up, Life is Calling, Love a Little Stronger, A Hundred Little Flames, When Love Came Calling, The One You Cannot Have, The Secret Wish List, It Happens for a Reason, It's All in the Planets. Though, Shenoy is a modern writer, her writings include all traditional aspects. She touches on the conventional type of women and her responsibility as a wife and the unconventional women who wish to deviate from the rules and regulations lay by the traditionalists. Preeti Shenoy's novels often feature a mix of conventional and unconventional characters, adding depth and variety to her stories. This aspect in the novels serves to enhance the overall storytelling experience.

Conventional Characters and Unconventional Characters

Conventional Characters: Meticulous and Responsible Professionals: In many of Shenoy's novels, you will find characters that are conventional in their professions, such as doctors, engineers, or corporate employees. These characters often value stability, success, and conforming to societal norms. Dr. Madhusudan's assertiveness in his counselling to Ankita that “Life is a gift, Ankita.” It means a lot to her”². “It Happens for a Reason” is the story of Vipasha who faced many twists and turns in her and leads her struggle in her life. Vipasha was a model by profession and she has a background of a strong family, but due to her hasty decisions she struggled a lot in her life.

Supportive Friends and Family Members: Shenoy's novels include characters that play the role of supportive friends or family members. They provide guidance, love, and a sense of belonging to the protagonist, often representing the conventional expectations and support systems in society. Veda's mother's words relate to the conventional picture of the women in the male dominated society. In her book, *The Rule Breakers* she asserts that “Sometimes, you have to sacrifice what you want in the interests of the family”³.

Tea for Two delves into the challenges face by Nisha and Samir during post-marriage. Akash, Nisha's younger colleague, props her up and encourages her independence. He plays a crucial role in helping Nisha establish her own business and later becomes her life partner. His willingness to embrace Nisha's children as his own is commendable, despite initial doubts. He affectionately refers to Nisha's daughter, Tanya, as an 'angel,' offering comfort when Nisha feels she hasn't accomplished much in her eight years of marriage. He always reminds her that "You have two angels, Nisha Don't forget that"⁴. When Akash decides to marry Nisha, he proposes Nisha but she is not in a position to accept the proposal. She hang backs for one reason that Akash is younger to her. Akash clears away Nisha's hesitation stating that:

"You become a father by nurturing your child, by being there for them when they need you, by being a role model, by sticking around when the going is tough. Can you deny that I have not done all that for Tanya and Rohit? I have loved them as much as I would if they were biologically mine"⁴.

The return of Tanu, Diksha's friend, marks a significant shift in her journey. Witnessing Tanu's self-assurance and independence encourages Diksha to reconsider her marriage with newfound courage. Tanu facilitates Diksha's introduction to Ankit and urges her to embrace her interests, ultimately empowering her pursuit of her aspirations.

However, when Diksha's husband Sandeep discovers her involvement in salsa training, he reacts aggressively in front of her peers and instructors. Unable to withstand Sandeep's intimidation, Diksha's friends Ankit, Gaurav, and Tanu rally around her, offering unwavering support and restoring her equilibrium. Their solidarity and assistance play a crucial role in assisting Diksha in regaining her autonomy and self-assurance.

Traditional Parents or Elders: Conventional characters can also be seen in the form of parents or elder family members who uphold traditional values and beliefs. They often serve as sources of conflict or pressure on the protagonists, representing the expectations and norms imposed by society.

"Why should only Animesh have that privilege?' Veda wanted to ask. But her mother taught her to never talk back to her elders, especially to her father. It was disrespectful, she was told. So she and her sisters would silently listen to her father's rants"⁵.

In the novel "Life is What You Make It", the protagonist states that "Sometimes, we have to make choices and live with the consequences, no matter how difficult they may be"⁶.

All the male protagonists surrender before their ladylove and dare to do anything for the sake of their love. Though there are some rifts in their relationship in the beginning, they are very

kinetic in impressing their sweet hearts by proving themselves as their deserving partners.

Unconventional Characters:

Free-spirited Individuals: Shenoy introduces characters who break free from societal norms and expectations. These characters may be artists, travelers, or rebels who challenge conventional ways of thinking and living. They often bring a fresh perspective and inspire the protagonist to question the status quo. Diksha, in *The Secret wish list* is strongly determined to pursue her wish list. She breaks the convention that woman should confine her circles with in her family after marriage. She is the most daring woman, who pursuits her wishes when she is nearing thirty five. As per her effort, her desires come true. "I refuse to let society define me or restrict my dreams. I am going to break free from the norms and create my own path"⁶.

Shenoy's *Tea for Two* explicitly deals how a wife is discarded by her husband who is a tycoon, who does not prefer his wife to be a dutiful mother, who does not care for her husband after the birth of their two children. Samir has lost interest in Nisha because of her typical house wife attitude. Nothing interests him in Nisha after she has gained some weight. There is a cleavage in their relationship. After Nisha proved herself as a successful entrepreneur and became a charming woman in her early thirties, Samir who remarried another woman namely Maya, could not withdraw his second look on seeing his former wife. "He is stunned to see me and gawks at my apparent transformation"⁴.

Non-conformist Lovers: Some of Shenoy's novels feature characters who defy societal norms in their romantic relationships. They may be involved in unconventional love affairs, such as interfaith relationships, same-sex relationships, or relationships with significant age gaps. These characters challenge the idea of conventional relationships and explore the complexities of love and acceptance. The protagonist Diksha in *The Secret Wish List* loves Ankit, her brother's friend, and she faces many oddities when their love is known to her family members. Diksha's brother and parents are very critical of her and compel her when she is nineteen to marry Sandeep a monotonous upper middle class boy. In her mid thirties, she misses her identity. She jots down her wish list and the wish list brings about a turning point in her life, with a torpedo attack from Sandeep who tosses his wife badly and tarnishes her image amidst her family members but she settles smoothly by marrying the vibrant tycoon Ankit.

Unorthodox Professions or Pursuits: Shenoy's novels also include characters that pursue unconventional careers or hobbies. For example, characters may be writers, photographers, or entrepreneurs, breaking away from conventional job choices. These characters often bring a sense of passion and nonconformity to the story.

Preeti Shenoy skillfully weaves together conventional and unconventional characters in her novels, creating a diverse range of personalities that reflect the complexities of real life. This dynamic mix of characters adds depth and intrigue to her stories, captivating readers with their relatability and uniqueness.

The novel *Rule Breaker* delves into the intertwined lives of Veda, Raghav, and Aryan, three individuals who are determined to push the boundaries of societal norms and conventions. Veda, a woman of middle age, has spent her life adhering to the rules and expectations imposed by society. However, she begins to question the meaning and satisfaction in her existence. Raghav, a young man trapped in a tedious job and loveless marriage, also challenges the traditional norms that confine him. Aryan, on the other hand, yearns to carve out his own path in life as an independent individual.

As the narrative unfolds, Veda, Raghav, and Aryan become caught up in a journey of self-discovery and defiance. They find themselves questioning the conventional rules that have dictated their lives for so long. Together, they set out on a quest to break free from society's constraints and reclaim their true selves.

"We all change, Vidya. Things happen to us and we change as people. Our relationships change. And as long as this growth makes you a strong person, a more compassionate person and a kinder person than that is all that matters...When I think about it Suraj and I have lost Bhuvan. But I have found myself. That is priceless. If there is one thing I have learnt from my experiences, it is this- speak your mind. Have the courage to go for what you want and stand up for it"⁷.

This novel explores themes of individuality, self-expression, and the importance of defying societal norms. Through the journeys of Veda, Raghav, and Aryan, Preeti Shenoy invites readers to consider the possibility of living life on their own terms, rather than being confined by convention.

"Is this all there was to a girl's life? Get married and leave the home you have known all your life? What was she getting into? Why had not she listened to Suraj and protested? Why didn't she have the courage to stand up for herself, and express what she wanted?"⁸.

The novel *The One You Cannot Have* revolves around the lives of Aman and Shruti, two individuals trapped in the relationships they have chosen but are unable to find happiness within. Aman is a successful IT professional who seems to have it all – a loving wife, Mansi, and a stable career. However, deep down, he is haunted by thoughts of his ex-girl friend, Shruti, whom he considers to be the love of his life. Despite being married, he constantly yearns for a connection with Shruti, unable to let go of the past.

Shruti, on the other hand, is engaged to Rishabh, a caring and reliable man. However, she still carries feelings for Aman, her ex-boyfriend. She finds herself torn between her loyalty to Rishabh and the strong emotional pull she feels towards Aman. As the story unfolds, Aman and Shruti's lives intersect once again, igniting the dormant flames of their past love. They grapple with their own desires while being entangled in commitments to their current partners. The novel delves into their complex emotions, dilemmas, and the consequences of their actions as they navigate the boundaries of convention and societal expectations. This novel challenges the conventional notions of love, commitment, and loyalty. It highlights the internal struggles of the characters who find themselves torn between societal expectations and their own desires.

Conclusion

Preeti Shenoy's novel explores the complexities of relationships and the consequences of deviating from conventional paths. The usage of conventional and unconventional characters in novels is a testament to the creativity and versatility of writers. It showcases their ability to craft compelling narratives that resonate with readers on multiple levels and also challenging them to think critically and expand their understanding of the world.

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