

## **Treatment of Man-Woman Relationship in Preeti Shenoy's *The Secret Wish List***

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to study the treatment of man-woman relationships in Preeti Shenoy's *The Secret Wish List*. The novel follows the journey of Diksha, a young woman trapped by traditional gender roles and societal expectations, who seeks to redefine her identity and pursue her dreams. At the outset, Diksha is confined to the conventional role of a wife and mother, where her aspirations are secondary to her familial duties. However, her relationship with her modern, independent friend Vibha acts as a catalyst for her emotional awakening. As Diksha confronts the emotional neglect in her marriage and realizes her unfulfilled desires, she begins her journey of self-discovery. This paper critically examines the evolution of Diksha's man-woman relationship, focusing on how Shenoy challenges patriarchal norms and illustrates the shifting dynamics in contemporary relationships. In tracing the gradual change of Diksha (who was once a conventional wife) into an independent woman, the paper reveals the feminist principles of self-identity and assertion. The book displays both emotional and mental duress of gender disparity, and it champions female independence in relationships. By awakening Diksha, Shenoy tries to show the value of mutual respect, self gratification and self-individuality between a man and a woman in the contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Man-woman relationship, gender roles, feminism, self-discovery, societal constraints, emotional awakening.

*The Secret Wish List* by Preeti Shenoy is a transformational novel which tells the readers about the voyage of a conservative woman Diksha, who escapes the social oppression and gets an opportunity to know herself once again. It is through Diksha that Shenoy examines the ins and outs of man-woman relationships with the implication that such relationships are usually linear according to the dictates of patriarchy. The novel shows how a woman unaffected by the tradition first tries to protect herself with the position she has in marriage and then decides to define herself the way she is. Comparing the traditionally presented marriage of Diksha with her friendship with Vibha, Shenoy criticizes the norms of society at the same time discussing structure of love, emotional neglect and self-realization. In the initial part of the story, Diksha was proposed as the Indian woman following the norms of a housewife, taking care of her family and marriage. Her marriage with Sandeep is that of subservience of social norms, she supports her husband in all his activities and takes up her responsibilities without any inquisition to her role. Resigned, Diksha in a landmark scene of the novel ponders her marriage: it is a typical Indian marriage. This is not something that good Indian wives do" (Shenoy 28). This quote was an expression of how traditional gender roles in marriage were bulging, as women must repress their needs and cater to the family unit with no question. This statement can be viewed as an evoke of perceived inferiority of women that could not be as freely expressive and emotionally fulfilled the traditional marriage had put on them.

However, as the narrative unfolds, Diksha encounters her friend Vibha, whose independence and self-assurance serve as a stark contrast to Diksha's life. Vibha, a modern woman with a career, confidence, and a sense of freedom, becomes the catalyst for Diksha's awakening. Vibha's approach to life challenges the limits Diksha has placed on herself due to her marriage and societal expectations. One particular moment of reflection is when Vibha advises Diksha: "*We all must live our lives; we should do what makes us happy. I kept pushing myself in my career, as I wanted to prove that I was as good as any man*" (Shenoy 74). This statement reflects Vibha's ethos of self-empowerment, and it sparks a sense of dissatisfaction in Diksha regarding her own life choices. Vibha's free-spirited life contrasts sharply with Diksha's confined

existence, and it pushes Diksha to start questioning her subjugated position in both her marriage and society (Sinha 81). As Diksha begins to recognize the emotional distance in her marriage with Sandeep, the novel sheds light on the psychological toll of living in a relationship devoid of mutual respect and understanding. One significant instance of this emotional neglect occurs when Diksha is prevented from attending her close friend Vibha's husband's funeral. Sandeep's refusal to let her go highlights the lack of empathy and emotional connection in their marriage. Diksha reflects bitterly on this moment, saying: "*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*" (Shenoy 65). This poignant moment emphasizes the emotional disconnect between Diksha and her husband and marks the beginning of Diksha's growing realization that her life and relationships need to evolve.

In breaking free from these constraints, Diksha embarks on a journey toward self-discovery. She leaves behind the traditional role of a wife and mother and begins to pursue her own desires, such as becoming a professional dancer. Shenoy introduces the change in Diksha as the symbol of modern woman who has to strive towards personal excellence. Interestingly, by seeking her passion, Diksha also decides to defy both the traditional conditions of marriage and also lays claim to her autonomy as a woman in the society, which tends to diminish female actions in general. When giving the decision a second thought, she says, I have found myself. I am not simply a wife, a mother, but a human being, a person who has a dream as well (Shenoy 82). This quotation speaks of Diksha empowerment where she gets a hold of her life and her hopes and thus recreates the relationship between man and woman into a modern reality where both respect each other and have right to their dreams rather than pass on what the society wants them to. In the development set on Diksha, The Secret Wish List shows a very important change in the normal relation between man and woman, a progressive one claiming the voice of the modern woman, her rights and her dreams. The narration not only contradicts patriarchal ideas but also marks the changing state of relationships where the individual nature and goals of the woman are no longer regarded as a lower priority to the ones of her husband. The way Shenoy

has depicted this journey can be seen as all the changes that are taking place in the society vis-a-vis women in the 21st century wherein empowerment and equality in their relationship has emerged as the focus of the definition of love and marriage.

Diksha is a good lady with the traditional vision of a beautiful wife and mother of India. She is wedded to Sandeep who, just like most men in a patriarchal society, sets his dictate on her. As we see Diksha in relation with her husband, it is quite traditional, with repetitive responsibilities instead of the actual emotional closeness. The story brings out the gender roles that she has to lead her life- the gender roles that define her as an obedient wife and mother who needs to put on secondary the desires and dreams. An example is when Diksha tries to make her wishes and desires heard, especially the desire that she still needs to study further, she is turned away by the norms of the society that say that a woman belongs at home, attending to the needs of the family. Shenoy utilizes the experiences of Diksha in condemning a concept that a woman is supposed to live her life around marriage and motherhood. The emotional burden of this conservative arrangement has been captured in the novel in a striking way by reflecting on her marriage by Diksha. At one point, Diksha acknowledges how her life is entirely dictated by traditional roles:

*“Ours is a conventional Indian marriage. And good Indian wives don’t do things like that. We have roles to play, roles we cannot step outside of. I have been playing my part all these years, but sometimes I wonder if there’s more to life than just being a wife and mother. Am I allowed to have dreams, or is my life meant only for others?” (Shenoy 28)*

This text shows how she is caught in the pressure of fitting in the role of a perfect wife and mother. It highlights the stifling quality to these roles and how many women have a hard time attempting to negotiate their own personal needs with social norms. As this journey progresses, Shenoy also conjures up to what degree such traditional roles are established in Diksha’s life, as well as the way that they define her personal self-esteem. The need to be like a

perfect wife and mother stems to a feeling of stagnation on the part of the individual. These expectations do not give Diksha room, and not just her husband, but also the society around her enforces these expectations. The social expectation that a women should only play a family-domestic role is manifested as soon as the woman tries to move with her personal interest. When she is done with primary school, she is not allowed to further her studies, even though she might be smart enough and want to study. The social pressure against the empowerment of the woman is also manifested when Diksha tries to break this social ice and fails in the end. In a moving scene, Diksha reflects on the societal pressures that limit her agency:

*“The world has a set path for women. They are born to take care of others, to care for the home, to love unconditionally, and to give up their own desires. But I don’t think I want that anymore. I want to create my own path, one where I can be more than just a wife. I want to live for myself, for the woman I was before marriage, and the woman I can be now.”* (Shenoy 47)

This wake-up is a starting moment in the inner conflict of Diksha against the nature of traditional gender which defined her life until this point. It is in such a strife that she starts doubting herself and her capability to express her own will. Shenoy takes this turning point to show the mounting frustration that most women feel when society keeps trying to dampen their ideals. In addition, the conservative belief that women should follow their role and never doubt it or nourish their own development is illustrated by her marriage to Sandeep (Mahajan and Gahane 15). The way he treats her depicts the common lifestyle of the patriarchy mentality according to which women are required to serve and to be obedient. The fact that Sandeep does not show any emotion that can support Diksha sharing about her goals only serves to enforce her mission to think that her needs are second in priority to tasks imposed on her. As she reflects on her marriage, she notes:

*“I know that there is only one word which sums up my marriage perfectly: Boring. There is no connection, no spark, no real communication between us. We*

*go through the motions, fulfill our obligations, but there's no love, no closeness. What kind of life is that? What kind of marriage is that?" (Shenoy 27)*

This line signifies the emotional disconnect between the couple and points to the deeper dissatisfaction Diksha feels within her marriage—an emotion that she has long suppressed due to societal pressures. Her marriage, while socially acceptable, is emotionally devoid, and Shenoy uses this portrayal to comment on how many women in traditional marriages suffer from similar emotional isolation, all in the name of fulfilling gendered roles. The suppression of Diksha's individuality and aspirations illustrates the larger societal expectation that women must prioritize family above personal fulfillment (Sivapriya and Gnanaprakasam 6). Shenoy uses Diksha's experience to criticize the notion that a woman's purpose in life should solely revolve around fulfilling the demands of marriage and motherhood. By showcasing Diksha's internal conflict between her dreams and the societal norms imposed upon her, Shenoy presents a compelling argument against these traditional gender roles that continue to restrict women's growth and personal happiness. As Diksha realizes her limitations within this structure, she begins to question the purpose of her life beyond the confines of traditional domestic roles. In her reflection, she states:

*"I feel trapped in a life that isn't truly mine. I am expected to fit into a mold that doesn't allow me to be myself. I can no longer live in a world where my dreams and aspirations are secondary. I need to be true to who I am and live for myself."*  
(Shenoy 56)

This epiphany is very important in the story as this is when Diksha starts to think of the possibility of getting out of these gendered roles imposed on her and finding her voice beyond marriage and motherhood. The change will start on Diksha when she comes across her friend Vibha who is the modern woman; independent, confident, and free to make her choice. The character of Vibha is instrumental in the awakening of Diksha, as she starts to wonder what all her life choices have been about, and how they have put many restrictions on her as a woman

through marriage and the expectations of others in the same. Vibha is free-spirited and her lifestyle is thus conflicting with the conservative nature of Diksha who through the interaction with her, she begins to understand the emotional and intellectual walls which have confined her. The novel shows the tendency of women to be stalked in such relations that do not allow them to develop their personality, they never have a possibility to express themselves beyond their status of wives and mothers. When Diksha hears about Vibha and how she leads a free life and wants to do what she wants to do, it makes Diksha pursue her passion in her life and in the process make up her relationship with Sandeep.

As Shanthini R. observes, the transformation of Diksha can be seen as the “emotional and intellectual battle that many women in patriarchal societies face” (Shanthini R. 4) as they seek to redefine themselves beyond traditional roles. In this light, Vibha becomes the model of a woman who is empowered to pursue her dreams and aspirations without societal constraints. Vibha explains her approach to life:

*“I do not live to please others. I live for myself. I push myself every day to become better, not because society tells me to, but because I believe in who I am. We, as women, must rise above the expectations placed upon us and assert our right to live fully, without apology.”* (Shenoy 74)

This quote, spoken by Vibha, highlights the self-empowerment that she embraces, which ultimately influences Diksha’s transformation. Vibha’s words act as a wake-up call for Diksha, who begins to question the life she has been living. For the first time, Diksha acknowledges the limitations that have been placed on her because of her gender, as well as the suffocating nature of her marital relationship. Vibha’s free-spirited life becomes the model of the "modern woman" that Shenoy presents, offering a stark contrast to Diksha’s traditional existence. Vibha’s words ignite a spark in Diksha, allowing her to view the possibility of a different kind of future—one where her aspirations are valid and attainable (Rathika 17). The turning point in their relationship comes when Diksha, after being denied the right to attend Vibha’s husband’s funeral, experiences

a deep sense of frustration. This refusal not only underscores the emotional coldness of her marriage but also serves as a revelation for Diksha: she can no longer continue to live in a suffocating relationship. Shenoy skillfully portrays the emotional turmoil that comes with a woman's realization that her marriage, based on traditional expectations, is ultimately unfulfilling. Diksha reflects on this moment of betrayal and emotional neglect:

*"I wanted to go to Vibha's side because she was more than a friend to me, she was family. And yet, my husband, the person I should be able to rely on, kept me from it. He was more concerned with trivial things than with what truly mattered—my emotional needs, the fact that I needed to be there for someone who was grieving. It made me realize how far apart we had drifted. This marriage no longer feels like mine. I no longer belong in this life."* (Shenoy 65)

This reflection speaks to the core of the emotional disconnect between Diksha and Sandeep, exemplifying the emotional coldness that can prevail in traditional marriages. Sandeep's refusal not only showcases his disregard for Diksha's emotional well-being but also highlights the broader societal tendency to prioritize men's roles over women's desires. This pivotal moment serves as the catalyst for Diksha's awakening. According to Samira Sinha, "*the modern woman's struggle in patriarchal setups is not just about breaking free physically, but about breaking free emotionally and intellectually, which is exactly what Shenoy shows through Diksha's transformation.*" (Sinha 12). Sinha's perspective aligns with Diksha's emotional upheaval, where her frustrations with her marriage and societal constraints force her to confront the reality that her happiness and individuality must come first. As the story progresses, Diksha's internal conflict intensifies. She begins to question whether she can continue to live in a marriage that suppresses her individuality and aspirations. The growing emotional divide between her and Sandeep creates an irreparable rift, and Diksha's journey of self-discovery becomes intertwined with her need to break free from the traditional roles that have defined her for so long. This

conflict culminates in Diksha's decision to pursue her passion for dance, which represents her desire to regain control over her life and to fulfill her personal dreams.

*"I have discovered myself. I am more than just a wife and mother; I am a human being with my own dreams. I will no longer let the expectations of others define my happiness. I choose to define my path, and I am going to walk it."* (Shenoy 82)

This moment of self-realization is a major turning point in the novel, signaling Diksha's break from her traditional, subjugated role into the realm of personal empowerment. Shenoy emphasizes the importance of personal identity in relationships, suggesting that for relationships to thrive, they must be built on mutual respect for each person's individuality and dreams. Diksha's decision to reclaim her identity and pursue her dreams as a dancer is an act of liberation, not only for herself but also within the context of her marriage (Cooley 29). In a similar vein, secondary sources also highlight the challenges faced by women like Diksha in traditional relationships. For instance, Shanthini R. in her analysis discusses the struggle for freedom and self-assertion within patriarchal constraints:

*"In the modern era, women are increasingly expected to break free from traditional roles, yet the societal expectations often continue to confine them. Preeti Shenoy's *The Secret Wish List* beautifully illustrates this conflict of identity—where women must navigate the delicate balance between societal approval and self-empowerment."* (Shanthini 17)

Through Diksha's awakening, *The Secret Wish List* critiques traditional gender dynamics and presents the modern woman as one who is empowered to pursue her desires without guilt or fear of societal judgment. Shenoy suggests that self-realization and personal fulfillment are essential for any woman, and these cannot be achieved if a woman is constantly confined to traditional roles that suppress her voice and identity. This struggle for identity is further explored by Sinha, who emphasizes how women's emotional struggles are often marginalized:

*“The representation of the ‘new woman’ in Indian literature reflects not only a changing social order but the silent battles that women fight to claim their voice, freedom, and self-worth. Diksha’s journey in The Secret Wish List mirrors this emotional and intellectual battle as she redefines her role not just as a wife, but as an autonomous individual.”* (Sinha 81)

Diksha’s decision to leave her conventional marriage behind marks a significant moment in her journey toward independence. She decides to pursue her dream of becoming a professional dancer, a decision that symbolizes her newfound freedom and empowerment. The novel illustrates how a woman’s desire for self-expression can challenge the norms of a patriarchal society that seeks to keep women confined within traditional roles. The story by Shenoy where Diksha is taken out of the traditional role of a wife and put into the role of an independent woman claiming her rights is a manifestation of the larger movement in the society that is moving towards gender parity and abandoning the tradition of dividing the world into genders (Mandal and Kundu 68). Diksha uses her desire to dance as an example to develop a personal and societal change through her decision to dance. The decision does not only question the traditional roles of women but also becomes an initiative against the societal controls that restrict women to perform limited domestic roles as prescribed <br> by the society. Shenoy depicts how such transformation occurs by referring to the inner struggle of a woman, Diksha, and her understanding of herself and her relationships with her man. At one point, Diksha reflects on her decision to pursue a path outside the conventional domestic role:

*“I have lived for everyone else for far too long. The world, my marriage, my family—they have all told me who I should be. But now, I realize I am more than a mother and a wife. I am a woman with my own dreams, my own desires, and it’s time I live for myself.”* (Shenoy 92).

This quote marks the moment when Diksha recognizes her own agency, and Shenoy uses this transformation to critique the societal expectation that women must sacrifice their aspirations

for the sake of others. The struggle to balance personal aspirations with familial and marital expectations is a recurring theme in *The Secret Wish List*. Shenoy challenges the traditional power dynamics between men and women, particularly in marriage. In the conventional marriage between Diksha and Sandeep, Diksha's identity is secondary to Sandeep's needs and desires. As Samira Sinha (2012) notes in her study of the novel,

*"Diksha's emotional and intellectual battle is an ongoing struggle against the expectations imposed on her by both her husband and society. Shenoy's narrative showcases the inherent conflict that arises when women begin to assert their independence in the face of these expectations"* (Sinha 81).

Diksha's decision to assert her rights and pursue personal fulfillment, despite her husband's opposition, is a reflection of the broader cultural shift toward gender equality. Through Diksha's journey, Shenoy demonstrates that love and relationships should not be rooted in control and subjugation, but in mutual respect and understanding (Mandal and Kundu 17). The emotional disconnect between Diksha and Sandeep is vividly portrayed when Sandeep prevents Diksha from attending Vibha's husband's funeral. This refusal highlights the emotional coldness in their relationship and exemplifies the societal dynamics that prioritize men's desires over women's emotional needs. Diksha reflects on this emotional betrayal, stating:

*"I wanted to go to Vibha's side because she was more than a friend to me, she was family. And yet, my husband, the person I should be able to rely on, kept me from it. He was more concerned with trivial things than with what truly mattered—my emotional needs, the fact that I needed to be there for someone who was grieving. It made me realize how far apart we had drifted. This marriage no longer feels like mine. I no longer belong in this life."* (Shenoy 65).

This moment marks a turning point in the narrative, where Diksha begins to understand that her marriage to Sandeep has not only emotionally stunted her but has also rendered her identity secondary to his. Samira Sinha further observes that, “

*Diksha's emotional awakening is not just about realizing the emotional coldness in her marriage, but about acknowledging her own repressed desires and aspirations. It is a journey of emotional liberation, where she begins to reclaim her identity and voice, not just as a wife but as an individual with the right to pursue her own dreams*” (Sinha 81).

This analysis underscores the significance of Diksha's growing dissatisfaction with her role as a wife and mother. Shenoy uses this dissatisfaction as a critique of the patriarchal system that relegates women to secondary roles within relationships, often leading to emotional isolation and self-neglect. Diksha's awakening is symbolized by her decision to pursue her dream of dancing, an act of defiance against both her husband and societal expectations (Khadiri, Venkataraman, and Jaisre 28). Through this personal journey, Shenoy powerfully addresses the evolving role of women in contemporary relationships, illustrating how the modern woman's struggle for autonomy is interwoven with the larger societal shift towards gender equality. As R. Venkataraman (2021) notes,

*“The modern woman's fight for independence is reflected in the character of Diksha, who begins to break free from the social constraints that limit her personal growth. Shenoy masterfully illustrates the emotional journey of a woman who seeks not only to break free from societal norms but also from the emotional confines that traditional relationships impose”* (Venkataraman 15).

Diksha's ultimate decision to leave her conventional life behind represents her rejection of traditional gender roles and her embrace of an identity that is uniquely her own. Shenoy highlights the importance of self-realization in relationships, suggesting that true love can only

flourish when both partners respect each other's individuality and aspirations. As Diksha embraces her newfound independence, she acknowledges the power of choice in relationships, stating: *"I have discovered myself. I am more than just a wife and mother; I am a human being with my own dreams. I will no longer let the expectations of others define my happiness. I choose to define my path, and I am going to walk it."* (Shenoy 82). This quote symbolizes Diksha's final step toward self-empowerment and marks the end of her internal conflict between fulfilling societal expectations and pursuing her own dreams (Nikam 13).

Preeti Shenoy's *also* offers an insightful portrayal of the emotional and psychological struggles women face due to gender inequality in traditional man-woman relationships. Through the character of Diksha, Shenoy critiques the traditional expectations that bind women to roles within marriage and family, often at the cost of their personal growth and self-fulfillment. As Diksha embarks on a transformative journey toward independence, Shenoy's feminist framework becomes evident, advocating for women's agency in relationships and beyond. The novel critiques the societal notion that a woman's value is determined solely by her role as a wife and mother, encouraging women to break free from these restrictive roles to pursue their own dreams and identities (Astuti and Kistanto 3). The novel begins with Diksha's life as a traditional housewife, fully devoted to her husband, Sandeep, and son, Abhay. Her marriage, while outwardly respectable, reflects a conventional, patriarchal view where women are expected to adhere to the duties of a wife and mother without questioning their role in the family structure. Shenoy illustrates how Diksha's sense of self-worth is compromised as she internalizes the belief that her dreams and desires are secondary to her familial responsibilities. This realization is encapsulated in the following statement by Diksha:

*"Ours is a conventional Indian marriage. And good Indian wives don't do things like that. We have roles to play, roles we cannot step outside of. I have been playing my part all these years, but sometimes I wonder if there's more to life than*

*just being a wife and mother. Am I allowed to have dreams, or is my life meant only for others?" (Shenoy 28).*

This quotation shows the emotional burden of the traditional roles that Diksha is to play and makes us aware of the fact that individual goals of women are crushed in the male-dominated society. Diksha fits the patriarchal conception according to which women are supposed to live to serve other people in her marriage. She is reduced to living a life that prioritises her happiness, and emotional and intellectual needs are not considered. The criticism on these traditional gender roles is well evident in the inferences of Diksha about her marriage as it is emotionally stunted. These thoughts raise by Shenoy an aspect of traditional gender roles that suffocates women. As Diksha tries to come to terms with own sense of self-worth, she gains a realization that her marriage has restricted her agency to a great degree. Her reflection on her marriage reveals the emotional disconnect that often characterizes traditional patriarchal relationships:

*"I know that there is only one word which sums up my marriage perfectly: Boring. There is no connection, no spark, no real communication between us. We go through the motions, fulfill our obligations, but there's no love, no closeness. What kind of life is that? What kind of marriage is that?" (Shenoy 27).*

This passage demonstrates the emotional isolation that women like Diksha often experience, despite being in seemingly respectable, conventional marriages. The lack of emotional intimacy reveals the psychological toll that the suppression of personal desires and identity can have on women within patriarchal relationships. Diksha's transformative journey, however, begins when she meets her friend Vibha, a modern woman who embodies independence, confidence, and a free-spirited attitude (Shanthini 56). Vibha's character serves as a catalyst for Diksha's awakening, representing the feminist ideals of self-empowerment and personal freedom. Through her interactions with Vibha, Diksha is introduced to a life where

women's desires and aspirations are not only valid but prioritized. Vibha's words challenge Diksha to rethink her role in her marriage and her life:

*"We all must live our lives; we should do what makes us happy. I kept pushing myself in my career, as I wanted to prove that I was as good as any man" (Shenoy 74).*

Vibha's statement reflects the feminist ethos of self-empowerment, challenging the societal norms that restrict women's personal growth. For Diksha, Vibha's life offers a stark contrast to the limitations she faces, and this awakening becomes a turning point in Diksha's journey toward self-realization. Diksha's evolving sense of self becomes further evident as she begins to question the emotional neglect in her marriage. Her realization that Sandeep is more concerned with trivial matters than with her emotional well-being is crucial to her personal growth. The turning point comes when Sandeep denies Diksha the right to attend Vibha's husband's funeral, showcasing his emotional indifference and further alienating her:

*"I wanted to go to Vibha's side because she was more than a friend to me, she was family. And yet, my husband, the person I should be able to rely on, kept me from it. He was more concerned with trivial things than with what truly mattered—my emotional needs, the fact that I needed to be there for someone who was grieving. It made me realize how far apart we had drifted. This marriage no longer feels like mine. I no longer belong in this life." (Shenoy 65).*

This passage captures the emotional disconnect between Diksha and Sandeep, marking a significant shift in Diksha's perception of her marriage and the limitations imposed on her by her traditional role as a wife. The feminist critique in *The Secret Wish List* emphasizes the importance of emotional and intellectual fulfillment for women in relationships. Shenoy highlights how traditional relationships often suppress women's voices and desires, ultimately leading to emotional isolation. Through Diksha's journey, the novel suggests that love and

relationships should be based on mutual respect, understanding, and emotional connection, not control or subjugation. Shenoy argues for a redefinition of man-woman relationships, one where women's aspirations are no longer secondary to those of their husbands (Kollontai 19). Diksha's decision to leave behind her conventional marriage represents her rejection of traditional gender roles. Through her journey, Shenoy critiques the notion that a woman's worth is tied solely to her role as a wife and mother. The novel advocates for women to redefine themselves in ways that allow for personal growth, self-expression, and the pursuit of their own dreams. As Sinha (2012) notes:

*"The modern woman's struggle in patriarchal setups is not just about breaking free physically, but about breaking free emotionally and intellectually, which is exactly what Shenoy shows through Diksha's transformation"* (Sinha 12).

This transformation illustrates the feminist ideal of emotional and intellectual freedom, emphasizing the importance of self-assertion and autonomy for women in relationships.

Preeti Shenoy's *The Secret Wish List* offers a compelling exploration of the evolution of man-woman relationships in contemporary society. Through the character of Diksha, Shenoy illustrates the emotional, intellectual, and social constraints placed on women in traditional relationships and the empowering journey of breaking free from those constraints. The novel serves as a critique of the traditional roles that women are often expected to play in marriage and family, advocating for women's autonomy and self-expression. By portraying a woman's journey from traditionalism to modernity, Shenoy not only emphasizes the importance of self-discovery and fulfillment but also highlights the changing dynamics of man-woman relationships in the modern world.

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