

QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND SELF ASSERTION IN PREETI SHENOY'S TEA FOR TWO AND A PIECE OF CAKE

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Abstract

The identity crisis is one of the central themes in Indian English literature which involves self-assertion and self-definition. The contemporary women writers depicted the women in their novels who struggle for their identity and individualization with the new feminist consciousness. This is evidently seen in Preeti Shenoy's novel Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake.

Keywords: Identity crisis, Patriarchy, Marriage, Assertion, Feminism

Literature is called the mirror of society which reflects the good and evil values of it. The depiction of the various issues in society expresses the inner structure of the human psyche before us. The feminist literature in India draws the attention towards the problems of the urban women. The contemporary women writers depict the predicament of the Indian women in their novels which reveals the social status of the country. They portrayed the women characters who struggle for their identity and individualization with the new feminist consciousness. This struggle of the women is evidently seen in the novels of Preeti Shenoy therefore the themes of quest for identity and self-assertion in her novel, Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake, are primarily focused in the present paper.

Preeti Shenoy is an emerging and shining star of the literary sphere of Indian Writing in English. Shenoy's novels are entirely about the women characters. Her stories revolve around and deal with women as a protagonist and their struggle for self-identity and self-assertion in the male orthodox society. Her women character are born and brought up in the urban society and they come across to the various problems in their social and personal relationship. The novel Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake is one of the most famous novels of Preeti Shenoy, published in the year 2012. It deals with the theme of consequences of love, marriage, relationship, patriarchal dominance, quest for identity and self-assertion of woman. It is the story of a woman who struggles for her individual identity and liberates herself from established marriage institution and patriarchal social set up.

Shenoy, in the novel Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake, portrays the character of 26 years old protagonist Nisha who is bold, assertive, plump and plain looking girl without a boyfriend. At the age of five, she loses her mother to cancer and also fails to have a caring father. She grows into a lonely child with hardly any friend to play with her. Her father's indifferences enable Nisha to stand her own feet and to earn her own money to establish her individual identity. She works in a small tourism company 'Point to Point' along with her five colleagues, among them she is very close to Chetana, a girl from wealthy family and Akash, an IIM aspirant who is five years younger to her. The job for woman is considered a key to happiness in a modern educated society which provides her self-reliant and individual identity. Nisha's urge for getting job and become independent is one of the notions of self-assertiveness. Shenoy describes her pleasure thus: "For me, it is everything. It is where I get my acceptance, it is my little secure world, it is where I get my financial independence" (Tea for Two, 37). Through Nisha's words, Shenoy expresses the sense of belongingness of a woman in the patriarchal society.

Life of Nisha takes a sudden turn when during her chance of date with her colleague Prashant at Taj hotel, she happens to interact with a wealthy Sameer Sharma who is the senior partner of 'Magellan International.' Sameer offers a date to Nisha and she goes with him as she doesn't want to lose the opportunity of a date with the person like Sameer and incidentally stays at his home. But, on the very next day, she is thrown out of the office for going on date with Sameer as Prashant fusses about her to Parinita Sachdev, the owner of 'Point to Point'. Nisha is depressed after losing her job and curses herself for that stupid date. All her dream fades away just as she wakes up from the deep slumber.

After losing job at 'Point to Point', she starts looking for another job but she gets rejected and some time she rejects the offer of some lecherous men who sees her lasciviously. A week later, Sameer calls her and offers a job of Assistant Manager at 'Magellan International travel Agency,' to the senior partner, who is Sameer himself. Consequently, Nisha and Sameer develop a love for each other and their

love later turns into a marriage. But, unfortunately the father of Nisha passes away before their marriage and there is no one in the marriage from Nisha's side except her two friends Chetana and Akash. Feeling of marrying with Sameer makes Nisha so crazy that she considers herself the luckiest girl in the world without knowing the future consequences of marriage.

It is true that life after marriage is totally different from life before marriage. Nisha, like most of the girl enjoys life of newlywed but after some days of her marriage, Nisha begins to get the restriction from Sameer as a husband. Sameer asks Nisha to quit the job because he thinks that it would not be good for his reputation continuing Nisha in the office and she becomes dependent on Sameer for everything. This kind of act from Sameer suggests the patriarchal dominance where man dislikes woman going out of home for work and treat them as the subordinated lives at home. Nisha adjusts her original objective without raising question. She shows her maturity and accepts the things what Sameer decides for her without craving for complete happiness. 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. To keep engage herself Nisha joins the cooking class, though Sameer disapproves it initially. She finds her pleasure in cooking and has learnt many dishes to cook includes Mughlai, Continental, Indian, and Chinese.

However, Nisha as a wife adjusts everything except her pregnancy, when Sameer insists her to undergo abortion because he has no 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 dislikes Nisha as a dutiful mother and thinks that having a baby is indeed a disruption in his life. He feels that Nisha doesn't give time to him and his sex-life has become totally non-existent. He has lost his interest in Nisha as she has gained some weight after giving birth to two children.

Shenoy explicitly describes how men treat their wives as the puppet of their hands and degrade their status in the family and in society. Sameer, after staying eight years together, one day announces his decision to break their marriage saying 'My house' and 'Your babies' and discards Nisha from his life. Sameer leaves her without money and also blocks her add on card. Sameer mails Nisha explaining the reason behind leaving her along with two children for his new girlfriend Maya. After reading the email of Sameer Nisha realises that to merge her identity with the husband, the woman cannot become

a complete person. Sameer shows his male supremacy that man can leave his wife anytime whenever he feels. Nisha is completely shattered with the words 'My house' and 'Your babies' and curses herself for every decision in life. Finally, she gathers herself up and arrives on decision to leave Sameer's home and along with her two babies she moves to her paternal home at midnight. Nisha shows her assertiveness saying, "It is my battle and I have to deal with it alone" (Tea for Two, 152).

The quality of self-definition and self-assertion is clearly seen in the character of Nisha when she finds difficulty in buying grocery for her livelihood and doesn't seek any help from Sameer. Nisha shows her persistency in her decision and firmly refuses the idea of Chetana who suggests her to take money from Sameer but she determines to raise her children with her own money. Shenoy mentions the determination of Nisha in the following words, "I do not want to call and take his handout money for my monthly expense. I am too proud and too independent for that" (Tea for Two, 146). The determination of Nisha shows confidence and stubbornness in her character. She starts her new life at her father home with the money she had saved while working in 'Point to Point'. Soon, Nisha realizes that this amount will last only for few months therefore she wants to stand on her feet and earn her own money but due to baby's responsibility she cannot stay away out of home for more than hour. She seeks help of her friend Chetana and Akash but Chetana shows boastful nature hence Nisha stays away from her. It is Akash to whom Nisha shares and discusses everything about her financial condition and asserts her decision confidently that she wants to create her earning source to lead her life.

Akash guessing Nisha's expertise in cooking helps her to start her own catering company and he names it 'Magic Saucepan'. Nisha, soon becomes famous in the city as an entrepreneur with support rendered by Akash and her widow neighbour, Mrs Billimoria. Nisha adopts the life which is forced by Sameer and makes him feel jealous about her transformation; and when Sameer observes her while serving food in the party he dislikes it and blames her saying she is polluting his name in the society. Nisha answers him, "I have finally found my calling, and too bad if you think catering is a demanding job. I do not want your money, your house-nothing" (Tea for Two, 225). Here once again, Nisha proves her quality of liberated and independent woman and she establishes her identity in the catering business.

During the course of her catering business Nisha comes close to Akash, now he has become an integral part of her life. She develops her feeling for Akash and he too feels

attracted towards Nisha. But, the destiny again tests her when Akash gets promoted as a factory manager at Pondicherry and sudden demise of her moral support Mrs Billimoria throws Nisha again in the problems. Now Nisha again feels alone and gets difficulty in running her business but she shows her self-assertiveness and manages all orders and deliveries alone. Meanwhile, Akash proposes Nisha for marriage but she hesitates on the ground what Sameer has done with her. Nisha remains firm on her decision and asserts that this socially constructed marriage institution is not necessary for lasting relationship. She decides to move in Pondicherry, she sells her flat in Mumbai and buys a property in Pondicherry with Akash where she starts her own restaurant. Nisha breaks the institution of marriage and stays in relationship with Akash in the same house along with her two kids. Akash too gives them the love of father which their biological father could not give them.

Thus, the paper concludes by saying that Preeti Shenoy through the character of Nisha proves that woman can

make her future without the security of marriage. The woman in the novel of Shenoy protests against the oppression and limitations imposed by patriarchal social set up and emerges profoundly independent woman who takes her own life decision by her own and establishes her individual identity. Here, Shenoy shows the transformation of Nisha from dependent to independent woman and shows her self-assertions. In this novel Preeti Shenoy declares through the character of Nisha that the woman is an autonomous and is capable to find her way to establish her individual identity which is primary concern of the feminism.

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