

# Exploring the Subordination of Women and the Journey of Self-Liberation in Preethi Shenoy's The Secret Wish List

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## Abstract

*The aim of the contemporary novel that explores the themes of self-discovery, personal aspirations, and societal expectations. Through Diksha's journey, the novel delves into the complexities of gender roles, the sacrifices women make for their families, and the courage it takes to pursue one's desires.*

**Keywords: Delusions, Injustice, Oppression.**

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Preethi Shenoy is a postmodernist in Indian literature. All of her works exhibit an unrestrained flow of feelings that attracts her readers. She has a talent for using words and images to create enchantment. Her works represent a variety of themes like human relationships, the young generation, women empowerment, love relationships, marriage, and culture. Her novels, such as *Life is What You Make It* (2011), *The Secret Wish List* (2012), *Tea for Two* and *A Piece of Cake* (2012), *The One You Can Not Have* (2013) *The Rule Breakers* (2018) Shenoy has won the hearts of female readers all around with her skill in developing unique and captivating characters. She discusses women's personal identities and unique qualities. Shenoy's depiction of today's woman in her novels is representative of the complexity of her present day existence and the myriad experiences she has to deal with in life.

Preethi Shenoy shows in this novel a woman's life, which is faced due to Distrust or suspicion of her parents, and life after marriage, where she just accepts everything as her fate, later she realizes her identity and wishes to change herself with her secret wish list. Hence, she achieves what she needed in her life. The story talks about awareness of women in the 21st century through the character Diksha. The story takes us to Diksha's past life as well as shows her present life as Sandeep's wife and Abhay's mother. She also portrays pain bearing in the heart of women and describes every moment of women's lives. In this novel, she explores the lives of women in domestic and professional life.

In *The Secret Wish List* (2014), Diksha, a girl at sixteen, finds her life revolving around school, boys and endless hours of fun with her best friend. But one day, all that changes. What starts as an innocent crush explodes into something far beyond her control. Eighteen

years later, she finds herself at the crossroads of life. Urged by a twist of events, a wish list is born, but can a wish list help her piece back her life together? She succumbs to the tangled mess of an extramarital relationship. Preethi Shenoy brings an extraordinary story that tugs at the heartstrings, with insight and wisdom, as she explores the delicate matters of the heart. *The Secret Wish List* is a captivating, engrossing, racy tale about following your heart, chasing your dreams and the meaning of friendship.

In Preethi Shenoy's novel *The Secret Wish List*, the character Diksha takes us on an immersive journey through the intricacies of delusions. Paranoia, which can take many different forms and is often described as an untrue fear or mistrust of other people, affects thoughts, actions, and emotions by analysing the origins, consequences, and manifestations of Diksha's delusions throughout the narrative, this study delves into the psychological subtleties of her persona. Diksha's distrust stems from deeply rooted anxieties and painful events. Her tumultuous childhood, which includes parental neglect and emotional abuse, has left her with a deep-seated fear of being betrayed and abandoned. The absence of constant love and support makes her feel even more vulnerable, which leads to the emergence of her paranoid tendencies. Social pressures and irrational expectations exacerbate Diksha's sense of inadequacy and aggravate her mistrust as she grows into adulthood.

Throughout the narrative, Diksha's paranoia is exposed in a number of ways that impact her attitudes and actions. She finds it hard to trust even her closest friends and family because she is so wary and questions everyone around her. Diksha's fear of abandonment makes her turn away from potential connections and sources of support, seeing seemingly innocuous actions as betrayals. Because of a vicious twist of self-sabotage caused by her hypersensitivity to perceived dangers, she impedes the advancement of her own career.

In Preethi Shenoy's *The Secret Wish List*, Diksha's character provides a poignant analysis of suspicion and its profound impact on people's psyches and social interactions. Through her path of self-discovery and healing, Diksha confronts the debilitating effects of her sufferings, ultimately emerging stronger and stronger. Her story illustrates the transformational power of courage, self-reflection, and interpersonal connections in overcoming fear and embracing an authentic and possibility-filled existence.

Diksha is subjected to a number of lectures and criticisms about the value and challenges of learning Indian classical dances from various individuals. They all emphasise how deeply embedded ancient dance forms are in culture and how much work and dedication are required to succeed in them when it is their turn to educate her. These lectures serve as a constant reminder of the pressure. Diksha is under to meet social standards and cultural norms. Despite having her own objectives and passions, she feels examined and criticised for not following the traditional paths to success. This torrent of criticism feeds her concerns and causes her to doubt her own abilities and value.

Diksha is increasingly suspicious after each rebuke. She begins to question her place in society and her ability to meet the high standards set by societal norms. The repetition of these lectures only serves to intensify her feelings of inadequacy and heighten her anxiety about being viewed as an outsider or failure. This image does a good job of capturing the psychological consequences of social pressure as well as the internal battle people go through when their personal goals and societal expectations diverge. It highlights how challenging it may be to negotiate one's identity and objectives within the bounds of cultural norms and how strongly unfavourable views from outside the community can impact one's sense of self-worth and community.

I cannot help thinking how unfair it is that my brother, Rohan, is never forced into doing things he doesn't want to. A year older than me, he is the school captain and is on the school debate team. I think my parents are very proud of him and never miss an opportunity to

mention his achievements to anyone who visits us. Being a popular boy, his friends come over to our place often (TSWL 03).

A deep-seated sense of unfairness and imbalance in their family dynamic, particularly about their brother Rohan, is expressed in *The Secret Wish List*, who is most likely Diksha. I can't stop thinking implies a persistent state of fixation, implying that these feelings of unfairness are deeply embedded and challenging to get rid of. Diksha feels angry since Rohan's apparent privilege of avoiding unpleasant tasks stands in stark contrast to her own experiences. This sense of unfair treatment makes her more agitated and bitter.

Rohan's achievements, including his roles as debate team member and school captain. She paints a vivid image of his success and recognition within their school community. By drawing a comparison between Rohan's achievements and their struggles, she intensifies their sense of inadequacy and inferiority. By making comparisons between Rohan's seemingly effortless accomplishments and her hardships, feelings of undervaluation, and the time to tell guests about his achievements. The fact that Rohan's accomplishment is frequently praised adds to her feeling of exclusion within their own family. The extensive nature of this praise and comparison makes her more paranoid, making them question whether they will ever be able to live up to Rohan's expectations.

This brings insight into Diksha's complex mental state, which is characterised by intense feelings of envy, anger, and insecurity. Her paranoia is heightened by the discomfort of constantly being in the background of their brother's achievement. The widespread feelings of injustice and inequality in the family dynamic are partially to blame for this. It clarifies the substantial impacts of comparison and affirmation in family interactions as well as the psychological costs connected to perceived injustice.

How can I tell Vibha all this? How can I admit to her that, yes, I feel trapped with Sandeep. That I long for a better life. The truth of Vibha's words hammers into my brain, hitting me right where it hurts. But I still do not want her to see my pain. After all, she is leading the life she wants. She has a job she enjoys, has good help at home, is independent and smart, everything I am not. So I turn away and busy myself doing the dishes. We sit in silence (TSWL 11).

Now her life focused on rethinking in new ways by her cousin sister Vibha, inspired her to make a secret wish list. She finds it difficult to bear the burden of sharing her innermost desires and unsaid suffering with her trusted partner, Vibha. The quiet thickens with what is not said as Diksha battles the demons of her dissatisfaction and the ghosts of her wish for a life unencumbered by the restrictions of her marriage. Vibha's comments reveal the raw reality that Diksha is scared to confront, piercing her armour of poise like shards of glass. The fact that she feels trapped within the confines of her marriage to Sandeep and yearns for a life beyond her grasp.

She fears the effects of sharing her inner struggle. She expects the pity and contempt that her disclosure may elicit. The stillness that lingers between them, burdening the unsaid silences, obscures their uneasy companionship. As she battles the persistent fear of being discovered, Diksha turns to the mundane routine of dishwashing as a way to drown out the dissonance of her thoughts. She looks away out of fear that Vibha will notice the flaws in her carefully constructed façade of happiness and the weakness hiding below her tough exterior. Feeling the strain in the air, Vibha tries to break the tight silence by saying something that only makes Diksha more suspicious.

She battles the tension between wanting to know and fearing the consequences of giving her soul to another person. Tormented by the spectre of uncertainty and caught in its tendrils, Diksha is imprisoned within her thoughts. She begins to question the truth of her feelings and her perception of reality as she navigates the disloyal terrain of her inner turmoil. Her self-made fear of being

judged and deemed unworthy of sympathy confines her. Diksha reflects as she confronts the harsh truths of her circumstances.

She is now only a shadow of the person she was before getting married and starting a family fifteen years ago. Amid her suffering, she clings to the imagined regularity, the illusion of contentment, to shield herself from the awful truth. In the tangle of her paranoia, Diksha battles the conflict between her desire for change and her fear of the unknown. She is stuck in a never-ending cycle of resignation and is unable to break free from the constraints she placed on herself. The sound of crockery clattering is the only sound breaking the increasing silence as she remains imprisoned in the tight grasp of her whispered facts.

Shenoy closely investigates Diksha's forced enrolment in an all-female college as an example of her enslavement. Diksha's sense of imprisonment is apparent as she battles loneliness and isolation. She develops paranoia as she adopts society's rules, which feeds a vicious cycle of compliance and self-doubt in her quest for acceptance. Shenoy's portrayal of familial pressure, traumatic experiences, and societal expectations highlights the profound psychological toll that paranoia has on a person's identity and well-being. As she confronts her inner demons and the reality of her wants, the protagonist eventually emerges stronger, shedding the bonds of paranoia to accept her actual self.

It wasn't the crime that you made it out to be. Had you left it, it would have probably died down on its own. It wasn't a big deal really. But the way you people twisted it, pulled me out of school, treated me like a leper, and the way you made it hang over my whole life, like the sword of Damocles, the way you never really listened to what I wanted, that was what has brought all this about (TSWL 250,251).

Diksha feels that she has been a quiet martyr all of her life. Her parents initially kicked her to Sandeep, treating her like a football. Ever since they were married, he has played football with her. Because she lacks a self-representation, Diksha feels repressed. She believes she hasn't accomplished anything, which makes her feel anxious and stuck all her life.

She was caught kissing Ankit in front of everyone, and her parents were the only ones who blamed her for the adolescent episode. Her parents never stopped blaming her for that incident, which makes her afraid and prevents her from ever exercising her free choice. Since that incident, her parents have been extremely strict with her and have never backed her in anything. Even after she transferred schools, her aunt and grandmother always kept a close eye on her and sent her to a tough women's college in a different city. Diksha felt that she had committed a crime after that specific episode and was never able to break free from their grasp. She now compels herself to satisfy her wants and needs.

She returns to Ankit because she fell in love with him despite being married. After she got back in touch with Sandeep, she forgot about their harsh relationship, even though she felt bad about it. She first confides in Sandeep about her choice, acknowledging that she had realised how miserable it had been to live with him for so long and that she no longer wanted to remain married. Sandeep revealed her decision to everyone and acted unexpectedly. Diksha was a little taken aback since she thought he would slap her and abuse her, but instead he called on her entire family to turn against her.

Diksha was initially hesitant to inform her family that she no longer wanted to live with him, but she later reflected on how nobody seemed to realise how unfair her life was and how her parents had never provided her with any support or comfort throughout her life. Her parents ask how she could be with another man after being married and having a child, and they criticise her for divorcing Sandeep. She talks to her parents about how they always blamed her and never understood her, and how she has been living her life as a silent martyr by force since she was treated unfairly and therefore unworthy of anything.

All of these problems sprang from an incident that altered Diksha's life and led her parents to believe she had committed a crime. They twisted it to the point where her parents hanged the incident from her for the rest of her life, treating it like a sword, because they thought that if they had not taken the incident seriously, it might not have had a substantial impact on her life. When she told her parents what she wanted, they never truly listened to her or trusted her.

To preserve her parents' reputation or for any other cause, Diksha decided that she would no longer tolerate the unjust and horrifying life she was leading. She decided to continue pursuing her contentment and sense of fulfilment. She has decided what she wants and where she wants to be in life, and she no longer wants to be constrained to her parents' wishes. She now speaks like a responsible woman, and Diksha's parents have little power over her other than to accept her. Her parents also think she is trying to justify her repulsive actions.

Diksha undergoes a profound change, overcoming the obstacles and challenges that have prevented her from pursuing her true passions and letting go of her self-doubt. In addition to achieving her long-held objectives, Diksha's perseverance and resolve provide her a fresh sense of empowerment and self-worth. The novel's conclusion touches on themes of self-discovery, pursuing happiness, and resilience. It serves as a powerful reminder to never give up on one's goals and that true fulfilment comes from being authentic to oneself. Diksha finds her strength and finds the courage to defy social norms. No matter how difficult the path may appear, there is always light at the end of the tunnel for those who dare to dream and strive, according to the Secret Wish List, which inspires optimism and possibilities. It gives us the confidence and inspiration to start our journeys of self-awareness and development.

Diksha's journey comes to an end, we will witness a tremendous shift from a woman who is repressed by social standards to one who accepts her true sentiments. Through Diksha's triumphs and setbacks, Shenoy explores themes of courage, perseverance, and seeking happiness. The novel's conclusion serves as a powerful reminder that the way to true fulfilment is to live authentically and pursue one's goals despite setbacks. Diksha's journey inspires us to reflect about what we truly desire in life and to break free from the constraints of tradition by following our paths to happiness.

The Secret Wish List offers closure while simultaneously allowing for introspection and consideration. It pushes people to consider their choices and their objectives seriously, encouraging them to pursue their passions and live sincere, meaningful lives. Only by embracing one's deepest desires and forging one's course in life rather than by conforming to society norms can one truly experience joy. By giving people a sense of empowerment and positivity, Diksha's character encourages us to embark on our journeys of self-discovery and personal happiness.

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