



VIPASSA -THE FACE OF NEW WOMAN IN PREETI SHENOY'S 'IT HAPPENS FOR A REASON': A FEMINIST STUDY

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Abstract

Ever since the emergence of mankind, there has been a quest for identity on the part of women folk. The societal frame work is such that women have not been given equal status as men in the society since time immemorial. This has led to the surge of various movements like feminism, women's right movement etc. which demanded equal right for women in society. One such movement was feminism which was a range of socio-political movements and ideologies that aimed to define and establish the political, economic, personal and social equality of the sexes. This movement began in the early 19th century and evolved in three waves till date, advocating the various needs of women as per the existing time. In the late 19th century, the feminist ideal led to the evolution of the term NEW WOMAN which was synonymous with a liberated sex which was pushing against limits which

society imposed on women. Vipassa, the protagonist of Preeti Shenoy,'s novel *It Happens For A Reason* is the true embodiment of this liberated notion of true woman of contemporary society.

Key words

Feminism, new woman, waves of feminism, courage

Bio-Note

Bablee Kumari is a doctoral candidate in English Literature from the University Department of English , Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribag. She has passed her Masters in English from VBU Hazaribag and also holds a Bachelor's degree in Education. Her research interest lies in psychological study of contemporary literature as it is capable of healing the grieving society from its core.

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Literature Review

Feminism has ever been a part and parcel of literature. It is the need of every single woman on this planet. Janet Richards says that “ the essence of feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean that there are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism.” Contemporary feminism has achieved its fine portrayal in the works of Preeti Shenoy. According to Daily News and Analysis’ “Preeti has a keenly observant mind for life.”

Introduction

Feminism is an interdisciplinary approach to issues of equality and equity based on gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality as understood through social theories and political activism. It has left a deep impact on literature as well. Mary Wollstonecraft penned down the first ever feminist discourse *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, and with it pioneered in the field of women empowerment. Her thoughts gave birth to the idea of “women empowerment” through literature. She is hence regarded as the grandmother of British Feminism.

The foundation of first wave of feminism was laid by Mary's book *Vindication of the Rights of Women* published in 1792. It was characterized by the women's suffrage movement and their championing of the women's right to vote. The second wave of feminism extends roughly from 1960s to 1990. The issues contained there-in are

broader than that of the first wave. The second wave voiced issues of equal pay, reproductive rights, female sexuality and domestic violence. The third wave of feminism emerged from the mid 1990's. The third wave challenges female heteronormativity. The supporters of third wave tried to redefine femininity and sought to celebrate differences across race, class and sexual orientations. There has been an introduction of fourth wave feminism as well that advocates the emergence of New Woman. This 'new woman' tries to move beyond the limits of patriarchy and set norms of society.

In the later phase of 19th century, the feminist ideal led to the evolution of the term NEW WOMAN. Sarah Grand, an Irish writer used the term 'new woman' in her article titled "The New Aspect of the Women Question" published in the North American Review in March 1894, to refer to independent women seeking radical change. The term was then used as a title by another writer Maria Louisa Rame. Henry James, a British American writer further popularized the term by using it to describe the growing number of feminists, educated, independent career women in Europe and the U.S.

Hence, the term New Women referred to a woman who has liberated herself from the societal norms and began to live, life on her own terms. However, this notion of 'new woman' is not static and will keep on changing with the changes coming in the social setting from time to time. While the 19th century 'new woman' was fearless, educated, passionate to change everything, the 20th century new woman was rational, decisive and of contradictory character. The present day 'new woman' is challenging the patriarchy from its root. She is unhesitant to even defy all social norms in order to satisfy oneself. Vipassa, the protagonist of Preeti Shenoy's novel *It Happens for a Reason* is the new woman of 21st century.

Textual Study:

Preeti Shenoy was born on 21st December 1971 in Kerala. Though she used to write diaries since the age of eight, she began her career as a writer in 2006 after her father's death. To cope up with the grief of her father's death in 2006, she began blogging which, in the course of time, got popular and made her begin her career as a writer. *34 Bubblegum's and Candies* was her first book. Her 2nd book *Life is What You Make It*, published in 2011 made her rise to fame by becoming a national bestseller. After that she has penned 13 books so far, all of which are

bestsellers. She is the spokesperson of feminism in contemporary world. All her works have a new form of new women, be it either *Veda*, *Vipassa*, *Ankita* or *Shruti*.

Vipassa is the protagonist of the novel *It Happens for a Reason*. She has been the embodiment of new woman who challenges the social patriarchal rules to establish herself as per her own whims. Vipassa was at the peak of her modelling career at the age of just 16 years. She was the star with her own fan following. Her family comprised of her ambitious mother, her rich father and her dearest friend Suchi. She was a happy go lucky girl. She did not care for life much. One day, through her friend she met Ankush Bhargava which changed her life. She developed an affection for the handsome guy. Love blossomed between them and on her 18th birthday party, she surrendered herself to him. The love between them resulted Vipassa into getting pregnant. When she breaks the news to Ankush, he refuses to have the baby or marry her and asks her to abort the child saying it 'was just a fetus'. This denial of Ankush shatters her. She wasn't expecting this from him. But she is the courageous new women. She takes the responsibility of her deed and decides to give birth to the child. She retorted to him,

“Shut up Ankush. For me this thing growing inside me is what is real. It is a part of you. This is a part of what we shared. It is a gift. I don't care what you think, I am having the baby.”

Even after repetitive pressure from her parents for abortion, she decides to have the baby. For this decision, she had to give up her career. She was shifted to a Kodaikanal from Mumbai for the delivery period, so that no one can come to know of the pregnancy. She lived there alone with occasional phone calls from her friends and father. She was forbidden from coming home as well. In the due course of pregnancy, she was even asked to give up the child for adoption, to which she denied. However, she gave birth to a baby boy Aryan, with no one of her own people around. But she did not lose courage. For one year, she stayed in Kerela with her friend Suchi's mother.. Though being offered assistance in survival from his father, she decided to live alone and sustain herself and her son. She then moved to Bengaluru after a year and started Paw poisons some of the dogs at Paw Factor. She gets a bad name and her business witnesses a downfall. This drains her of her courage but she fights him and gets herself proved innocent in the death of the dogs. She does everything single handedly to sustain herself and her son Aryan. She also works as a gym instructor and sustains Aryan alone for fifteen long years. However, Aryan begins to search for his father's whereabouts and discovers that he too is still unmarried and has become

a famous music personality. Aryan reaches out to him on mail and Ankush seeks forgiveness for his past deeds.

He returns to India and meets Vipassa. He wants to apologize for his past deeds and marry Vipassa. Vipassa, too, being a sensible new woman, kind-heartedly accepts Ankush's proposal and marries him.

Critical comparison with various New Women of our literary world

Ever since the penning of the New Women began in literature, different shades of new woman has been painted by writers of Indian English Literature. The New Woman has traversed through significant untrodden paths in the course of her journey which has tried to shape her personality as per the demand of time. The acquisition of this present day New Woman's face has not been the result of a day, rather of a long course race. The New Women who were 'COVERT' in the works of writers like Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* or *Custody*, has been shedding their veils and become 'OVERT' in the works of writers like Chitra Divakaruni's *Mistress of Spices*, and Preeti Shenoy's *It Happens for a Reason..* Hence a New Woman has come a long way in the works of Indian English Literature. The woman in Manju Kapoor's novels are strong and intellectual but somewhat are bound to follow the traditional conventions and practice them with sincerity and seriousness. Astha, the protagonist of *The Married Woman*, though was a courageous woman who wanted her individuality to get acknowledged and hence, worked hard and fought for it, but was not bold enough to publically accept her lesbian relationship with Peepali Khan, like Vipassa, who accepted her illicit child boldly. While Astha finally returns to her husband adhering to the societal norm, Vipassa does not hesitate to leave her family and remain in isolation. Anita Nair's protagonist Akhila of *Ladies Coupe* somewhat resembles Vipassa to voice her inner desire. Akhila, being frustrated with her life silently walks away on a voyage in a ladies coupe to get the answer of her most disturbing inner question- whether marriage is a hurdle in the assertion of one's individuality? Whether a man is important for the existence of a woman? Vipassa takes this notion a little further by leaving her house, leaving behind the support of all the men of her life, to lead the life of her own choice, to give birth to and nurture her child single handedly. Sashi Despande's *That Long Silence* educated women to acknowledge their inner demands in this patriarchal world. It delineates the adverse effects of the suppression of desires by females and her silence on both the sections of society. Despande's novel has paved the way for modern New Woman to raise her voice against all odds of life and support her own self in every possible manner. It is this base that has supported New

Women like Vipassa to voice her desires and demands, and strive hard to achieve it. It has empowered woman to find her true self.

“To achieve anything, to become anything, you have got to be hard and ruthless”. True to every alphabet, Sashi Despande’s opening lines of her novel *That Long Silence* justifies the journey of New Woman, both in literature as well as in the present society. From being oppressed to becoming somewhat free, from being covert to overt, from being meek and timid to adopt boldness, from being submissive to become defiant, the New Woman has come along a long way but the journey has not been over yet and she still has to keep going in quest of her identity and individuality.

Conclusion

Preeti Shenoy is the spokesperson of feminism in today’s world. She paints new woman in different shades in her works. In *It Happens for a Reason*, Shenoy has portrayed a fearless new woman who dares to give birth to a child out of wedlock in this orthodox patriarchal society. She takes the responsibility of her acts boldly, when even her male partner runs away from his responsibility. She refuses to take help from her father during her pregnancy and decides to bring up her son all by herself. In this way she challenges the notion of the need of a surname in either the existence of a woman or in bringing up her child. She is the bold lady of contemporary society who fights courageously whatever situation falls before her, be it Damodar or her own mother. However, despite being hard from outside, she is soft within as the coconut as she forgives Ankush for his deeds and accepts him without any grudge as soon as he extends his arms towards her. This is the new woman of today. Undoubtedly, Vipassa is an epitome of the modern women championing the cause of emancipation and upliftment of womankind. She is a source of Inspiration to women who wish to meet the challenges and resolve the issues by their own grit and effort.

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