

CHOICE OF PROFESSION IN THE POST-MILLENNIAL WOMEN CHARACTERS, AS REFLECTED IN THE SELECTED FICTIONS

Pratima S. Dhande,
Research Scholar

Shri Binzani City College, Umrer Road, Nagpur

ABSTRACT

India has been predominantly following the patriarchal tradition over the ages, where the rights and duties amongst the genders were well-defined with no scope of alteration. Along with their set duties and an occupation, the men community has always enjoyed an allowance of liberty to do things the way they want, while on the other hand the women were marginalized. Patriarchy didn't allow them to lead a life of their choice and gave them no permit towards education or profession. With the turn of time and with the eventual installation of rights and duties by the Constitution, women slowly gained strength and began to rise and stand for their rights. They became liberated, which was mostly due to their choice of education and profession. Over the past two decades, it has been found that there has been a monumental change in what women preferred then and what they prefer now. Ideally, it was only teaching and nursing which were considered as a profession most suitable for women, but with the turn of the millennium, we have seen a paradigm shift in the attitude of women towards their lives. Their preferences have changed. This is vividly described by the writers of India with their portrayal of their women characters from today's time. The researcher has tried to point out the choice of profession made by these women not only to earn their livelihoods but also to pursue their passion and their profound interests with the help of a few characters from the selected fictions of Madhuri Banerjee and Preeti Shenoy.

Keywords: post-millennium, patriarchy, choice of profession, self-reliance and attitude towards life

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Madhuri Banerjee

Madhuri Banerjee is one of the most prominent names amongst the post-millennial authors. She has authored several books, out of which some are listed as bestselling fictions. Her credibility rests upon the achievement of being the first Asian female writer, who has written a trilogy. She has climbed the ladder of success on her debut novel *Losing My Virginity and Other Dumb Ideas* which sold over *forty thousand* copies. She has depicted independent post-millennial women in her other books like *Advantage Love*, *Mistakes Like Love and Sex*, *Scandalous Housewives* and *Forbidden Desires*. Her fictions sketch the portrait of Indian women, who are completely in contrast to the female characters shown by the Indian women writers of the 80s and 90s. Her portrayal of the women characters is an exact replica of the post-millennial metropolitan woman of today's India. She not only portrays women with indifferent professions, who challenge the set norms of patriarchy through her fictions, but also in reality she herself practices the same. Along with being a successful writer, she is an accomplished Bollywood film writer.

1.2 Preeti Shenoy

Preeti Shenoy is a prolific post-millennial Indian woman writer, who started her journey of writing as a blogger and eventually became the bestselling author of many of her fictions. Her fictional novel *Life is What You Make It* is a path-breaking story of Ankita Sharma, who battles bipolar disorder. This book has not only made her popular, but has listed her name along with those women authors, who have tried to change the attitude of people towards women writings. She is one of those few women who have been nominated for the Forbes List of the 100 most influential celebrities in India. She is amongst the bestselling authors in India because of the immense popularity of her books. She not only excels in the field of writing, but is also an influential Ted Talk speaker and a self-taught artist, who paints with water colours and oils. Her lifestyle includes yoga, which is a striking feature of the post-millennial women, who are extremely conscious about their health and fitness, which was not seen in their predecessors.

1.3 A brief discussion on the choice of profession made by the female protagonists in Madhuri Banerjee's Fictions

Madhuri Banerjee shows her women characters as strong, confident and who take their life in their stride. Her protagonists are the face of those strong women, who have learnt to live their lives their way. They are smart and dynamic.

One such girl is Trisha Mathur from the fiction, *Advantage Love*, who leaves Lucknow and comes to study at JNU, Delhi with an aspiration of a brighter and better tomorrow. She is a smart and confident girl from an average family background. She is an avid debater and in the din and drama of her routine, meets a rich boy in college, Vedant Kirloskar, who is a young politician in the making. They encounter each other at a debate competition and from there onwards they debate about anything and everything under the sun. He wins her heart with his charming personality and his poetry and his love for literature. Trisha keenly helps Vedant in his campaigning rallies and would manage the whole show for him. Eventually they get engulfed in the flames of love, which turn them into inseparable lovers. Vedant likes Trisha, but he is the type of a boy who is a good son and will expect a sacrifice from the girl. Moreover, he is fearful of his parents. Upon completion of the college, he is compelled to leave Delhi to pursue his political career in Mumbai, but Trisha wishes to continue her studies and take up a job at Delhi and wishes to chase her dreams. This is where their relationship goes for a toss.

Soon after her graduation, while Trisha is struggling with the loss of love in her life, she receives an appointment letter from UNICEF. Her joy knows no bounds as this new job was going to give new opportunities in her life and she would travel the world. She eventually settles for a job as a UNICEF personnel. Although she is a junior, she gets to be active in her job front and the travels would keep her away from her stressors. As the Communication for Development Specialist, it is her job to design, manage, monitor and evaluate the strategic communication for behaviour and community led social change. It is her job to communicate and coordinate with government officials, programme staff and other UNICEF partners almost all the time. She also has to take extensive interviews.

With the profession of her choice, Trisha is happy serving the organization. She would not have been happier, she felt. She is proud of herself as she feels responsible and important. She is like a task manager, like a bullet train, taking everything together to its destination at the right time and right place. Trisha feels confident. She feels she can take anything that comes in the way of her success. She is not ready to compromise anything for

the sake of her job. It is where she finds her peace and her passion both. Nothing can stop her from being where she is and doing what she wants.

Another one of Madhuri Banerjee, *Losing My Virginity and Other Dumb Ideas*, introduces Kaveri a 29-year-old, soon to be a 30-year-old, who is in the pursuit of true love. She is a vigorous and independent woman, who has interest in art and who has quite high standards when it comes to choosing her men. She leads a great life in the metropolitan, Mumbai. All her life, she has dreamt of finding the true love and waited for the right time. She is proficient in seven different languages and works as a freelance interpreter in Mumbai. In this fiction Kaveri's principles are revamped and modelled to suit her necessities and aspirations.

When we put a spotlight on Kaveri, we come to know that she plays the piano, she knows animations and she has studied modern art in her free time. She knows seven different languages, which gives her an exceptional career as a freelance interpreter. Her job is to translate languages for people, like French to Hindi or Spanish to English or Russian to French. The embassies call her to seek her help in translating important documents from their native language to Hindi. Also, when there are conferences, she translates that language for the Indians. Also when delegates from different countries come, her job is to translate the conversation between the dignitaries. She also works as a guide for most important delegates' wives or families. Kaveri has quite an interesting job and she makes the most out of it. It is not the dull monotonous type desk job, but the one where she meets new people and travels across the globe. She is unstoppable, but a thorough professional. She also has important people on her friend list, but she is quite reserved when it comes to men.

Madhuri Banerjee's *Forbidden Desires* speaks volumes of modernization, urbanization and of women empowerment. She has shown her women characters as being most vulnerable and shut, to the ones who didn't fear to show their sexuality. In this fiction, we take a stride in Naina's life. She is a beautiful woman, born and brought up in London, with an Honours degree in English Literature, who surprisingly starts her career as a chef at the Four Seasons in London. She meets Kaushik and they both fall in love. After getting married, going back to India for the sake of their child is the biggest decision of her life. She throws her modern, happy-go-lucky lifestyle away for the sake of her child, which she was perfectly fine with. She becomes a dedicated protective caregiver for her two daughters by then. As fierce as she was, she becomes soft and gentle then. After five years, Naina decides

to pursue her passion. She decides to do what she was best at. She begins her cooking classes in batches. This allows her to do what she loves the most and at the same time take care of her children. Pleasingly, she is able to carry all this out well and eventually also ends up writing a cookbook. She also starts her own cookery show. Later at the end, Naina with all her might makes her dream come true, as she manages to open her own restaurant 'Heaven in a Bowl.' Nothing could make her happier than that day in her life at the inauguration of her restaurant when all her near and dear ones sit together and eat the meals prepared by her and appreciate her wonderful food.

Definitely times have changed. In the olden days, women were considered weak and their duties were confined only to cooking and birthing. Home and kitchen was considered a domain only of a woman. It is also true that from the ancient past, we know that being a chef was a man's job. From the times of the kings and knights, 'khansama' as we called them in Indian history, were those men who cooked food in the king's kitchen. It was their job to cook food for large numbers, whereas women cooked only for their families in their households. As a matter of fact even today, men are appointed as chief chefs and hold important positions in the hotel industry. Women these days have proved that they are capable of taking up the same level of responsibility and pressure of the hotel industry and also slog in the kitchen as men can. They are no less than men. We say a woman is the goddess of food, the Annapurna. It is she who brings taste and nourishment to the family's palate. With the example of Naina, who has taken up a career of a chef which was predominantly meant only for the male folks, it is clear that today's women are strong and can take up challenging jobs, which involves a lot of pressure. It is also true that Naina is self sufficient as she is able to earn her living by the pay cheques earned out of her cookery lessons, which she is most passionate about, which is kind of an achievement in itself.

1.4 A brief discussion on the choice of profession made by the female protagonists in Preeti Shenoy's Fictions

Diksha from *The Secret Wish List* like other girls is a very passionate and ambitious girl next door. She is an enthusiastic and adventurous person. Eventually she finds somebody who makes her feel special. With these feelings, she grows stronger as a person and finds herself living her dreams. But after an incident in her childhood, she is compelled to bury her desire of living her life the way she wanted. She is forcibly separated from the love of her life and sent to a nunnery for further education. The world which she had just started exploring,

comes shattering down forth her. Feeling hopeless and helpless, she marries Sandeep. Her life then revolves around her husband and their 9-year-old son, Abhay, and her sole focus is to tend to their needs and to take care of them. She is stuck in a compromised setting, where the husband never realizes that she too might have some aspirations and that even she may need him to lend her a shoulder and an ear from time to time. Eventually while she is drowned in her day to day routine, she encounters her cousin Vibha, who speaks about the Diksha she knew and how she has metamorphosed into something that lives in this cocooned life. She makes her realize that she is a good daughter, sister, wife and a mother, but she is unaware that she is suppressed under all her responsibilities and she has lost herself while doing so a long time ago with no hopes to bring it back. She has devoted herself so much to her family and their needs that she has forgotten what she was and that all her dreams had flown away in the midst of her constant struggle of keeping up with her responsibilities. This continues only until that time when she realises that there is more to her life, and then she unleashes her inner self and decides to become independent. It is the quest of her identity. She chalks out her wish list and empowers herself to make it into reality. She learns her favourite dance form Salsa and regains her confidence. Slowly, she opens her wings wide and soars into the sky. With a lot of passion and perseverance, she gains a lot of expertise and takes up as a Salsa instructor and becomes successful. Once she stands on her own feet, she is able to take some important decisions in her life and flourishes even more.

While we understand the character of Diksha, she is perpetually understood as a completely dependent woman, somebody who stands as a classic housewife of an Indian household. She spends her days and nights doing the best for her family ignoring the fact that she has a life to live that she has her own likes and dislikes. She forgets herself completely and devotes herself for the betterment of her family. Thankfully Diksha is reminded of her own self by her cousin and she then realizes that she has completely lost herself. Her persona and her talents are all lost under the layers of her responsibilities. Only when she decides to pursue her passion of dance, she comes to life. All the colours of her life are reinstated. She becomes confident. From a loving wife and a nurturing mother, she becomes this perfect Salsa instructor. With her new profession, she who was an ugly duckling, has transformed into this beautiful graceful swan, moving with a lot of poise in the society, with her head held high and teaching other students the beauty of dance. Long ago, who knew that there would be this foreign dance form which could be taught in India and would be loved by the masses and that an Indian woman could learn it so well and execute it so gracefully! With Diksha's

example, it is clear that the profession she chooses with her liking changes her life. She comes closer to her own self and discovers her lost self and starts enjoying this new phase of her life. A rose which drooped has blossomed again, spreading its fragrance all around it and making every eye twinkle which has put its gaze on it.

Next, we meet Vipasha aka Vee in Shenoy's next fiction *It Happens for a Reason*, which is a total page turner. The story is about a young girl whose single choice changed her life drastically. She has a successful modelling career at the age of 18 years. She is single, but when she gets pregnant, she chooses to defy the norms and give birth to her baby, after which she obviously is subjected to the dire consequences. She sacrifices her stardom and her glamorous career, which is at its zenith at that time. She cuts off ties with her filthy rich parents, who give her everything but love and later try to cover up the situation with their wealth. She also cuts loose the boy Ankush, whom she loved, but who had no guts to accept their baby born out of their love. Vee is alone, on her own and at the mercy of the world, but she doesn't succumb to the difficulties of her life. Undoubtedly, she proves out to be a strong girl, a mother, who battles with the whole world for her baby boy, Aryan. Aryan on the other hand feels that he has the coolest mom ever and he has a strong feeling that she would definitely find a suitable partner for herself some day. Vee, while taking her life ahead on in her stride, takes up two quite unusual careers, one as a gym instructor and the other as a dog-boarding facility owner, while struggling to support herself and to raise Aryan. She is deeply involved in her professional life and takes it very seriously and is therefore able to support herself and her son. The Paw-Factor is running quite successfully with her perseverance and her love for dogs. Vee is very passionate about her job as a gym instructor because it not only keeps her fit and invites a lot of compliments, but it also pays her well.

With this modernisation, many new jobs are taking roots. One such profession which is at its boom is of a fitness instructor. Eight out of ten people irrespective of their gender these days are health conscious, be it a youngster or an elderly. The gymnasiums are always crowded morning or evening. Slowly, women have found their way into this new arena. From ancient times, fitness is considered as a forte of men mostly. Of course, we do have few examples of valiant queens, but we can count them on fingertips. It was considered a taboo for women to pursue this field. With the changing times, it got understood that a healthy lifestyle for women must include fitness and sports and so started the trend of getting trained. These days we see that women are engaged in all sorts of physical activities from yoga to kickboxing and from swimming to wrestling. We have women competing in body building

championships at international levels. Such is the transformation these days. Women only are proving out that they are no less than men and also that they need to take care of themselves as much as the men.

We know that women are life-givers. They make everything lively and beautiful around them. Also when it comes to nature, animals and birds, they know how to take care of them. It is their innate quality. From olden days, women are considered as being good teachers and doctors, for they have the quality of nurturing which men do not or maybe not to that extent. Vee is a woman and a mother, who loves animals dearly. She knows that she did the best when she decided to open Paw-Factor, to take care of pet dogs, when their families were away. It was such a responsible job, but it was a risk worth taking. The facility was at her residence itself and her son and she would look after the dogs and protect them like their own family. She has a caretaker and a veterinarian who would make sure that the dogs are well fed and fine. Vee is happy that she is able to fetch enough for her living from the facility and that she is able to support her living. Instead of taking up a conventional 9 to 5 job, Vee made a wise choice. She is able to earn for her living and is able to take care of her son. She has no other help around the house, so it is the best life situation that she can have. She is happy that she is around all the time and that she is able to cater to the needs of her son. This work profile has got her name, fame and a lot of liking in the society.

It's All in the Planets, another one of Preeti Shenoy has Nidhi as her protagonist, a carefree and full of life. Nidhi is a matured woman, who quit her promising and lucrative corporate job to follow her passion. She now runs a small therapeutic clay modelling class and does part-time content writing. She maintains a blog called 'A Pot of Clay that Holds Gold'. She fell in love with Manoj whom she met a couple of years ago and is in a stable relationship with him. But soon, she seems to be falling out of love when he fails to understand why she has left her productive job in the pursuit of her passion. Also he doesn't approve of any of her writings other than a magazine or a publication and has no regard about what Nidhi's likes. He constantly dismisses whatever she does which makes her happy and satiated. She is ambitious, but for her passion is more important than money and a profitable career. One day, she gets a chance to meet Aniket on a train and they both get into talking. Soon Nidhi lands herself into becoming his relationship and fitness coach and her task is to make Aniket's and Trisha's relationship a success.

The world is changing so much day by day. Who knew that pottery, which is an occupation confined to that poor village potter would be a modern day profession and would be considered therapeutic as much as an interesting hobby. Who knew that it would fetch a lucrative yield and make an artist's life easy and comforting within the walls of his studio or home! Nidhi finds her peace with her pottery. She also writes a blog and vents out her thoughts. She is a content writer for magazines and newspapers. Unlike the same old boring teaching job or the job of a steno in an office, content writing brings relief. It seems interesting, simply pouring out at your will all the words of wisdom. What more can one want and yes, getting paid for the same. I think the speed with which the world is evolving, in no time all the old practices will dissolve in no time and people will get engaged in the skilled jobs that they are most interested in.

Author	Fiction	Protagonist	Profession
Madhuri Banerjee	1. Advantage Love	Trisha	UNICEF Personnel
	2. Losing My Virginity and Other Dumb Ideas	Kaveri	Freelance Translator
	3. Forbidden Desires	Naina	Chef and Restaurant Owner
Preeti Shenoy	1. The Secret Wish List	Diksha	Salsa Instructor
	2. It Happens for a Reason	Vipasha aka Vee	Gym Instructor Dog Boarding Facility Owner
	3. It All Happens for a Reason	Nidhi	Pottery Instructor and Relationship and Fitness Coach

Table 1.1: Professions depicted in the fictions of the selected authors

II. CONCLUSION

Women have embraced a submissive attitude over the age and in the Indian tradition this submission is labelled as the jewellery of a woman. One of the main reasons of male dominance was that the women were not economically independent. That is why the women writers prominently talk about economic independence of women in their writings. This choice of profession made by the post-millennial women is a bold statement against the

patriarchy, which had confined them to the household arena. By getting to choose these professions, they have been able to express themselves better and to support their lifestyles.

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