

Gender Roles and Societal Expectations in the Novels of Preeti Shenoy

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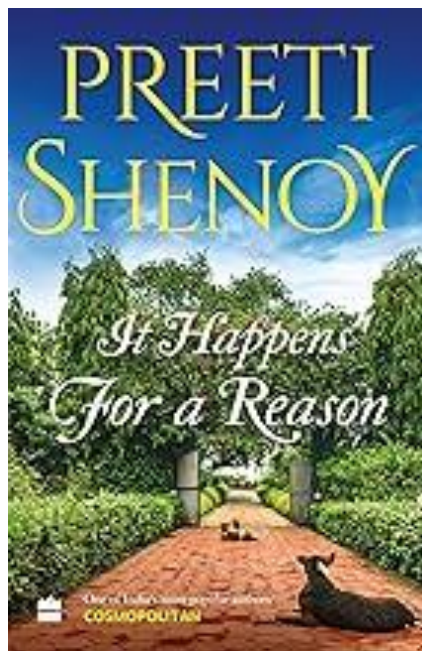
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Abstract

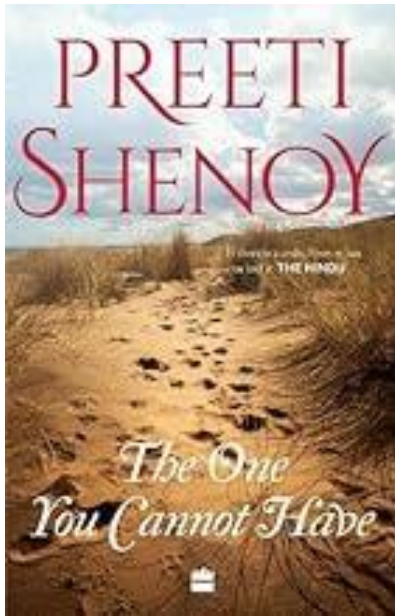
Preeti Shenoy, a popular Indian author, is also a speaker and illustrator who primarily explores themes of love, relationships, female empowerment, personal growth, mental health, and navigating societal expectations through her novels. Preeti Shenoy's novels *It Happens for a Reason* and *The One You Cannot Have* explore the twists and turns on one's inner world, blended by the themes of love, loss, personal development and life's volatility. A common thread in both works is how characters work through emotional complexities, particularly through the yearning of love and agony later finding solidity in self-discovery. Through relatable characters and vivid storytelling, she is talking about several societal challenges regarding gender roles, societal customs and expectations, and the family dynamics in personal decisiveness is also elaborately woven into both novels, presenting an analysis on societal norms while advocating for personal sovereignty. Shenoy also touches on the idea of closure, both in relationships and during the time of maturation is another recurring component, where characters must come in terms with the past to stride ahead.

Keywords: Preeti Shenoy, *It Happens for a Reason*, *The One You Cannot Have*, Personal development, Gender roles, societal expectations.



Courtesy: www.amazon.com

Preeti Shenoy's *It Happens for a Reason* is a story about love, friendship, exploration of life's unpredictability and the choices one makes that change the course of one's life. The story illustrates the idea that everything that ever happens in our life, happens for a reason even if it's good or bad. These experiences will shape us to be better in every aspect encouraging us for personal development. The protagonist of the narrative, Vipaasha (vee) is bits of the author herself. Vipaasha is a single mother who faces various challenges from deprivation to disappointment. As an independent woman who lives opposite of societal expectations, the struggles she faced made her question the point of her life. As the protagonist's story progresses, she eventually understands that every difficulty or obstacle she came through led her to find deeper connections in people and in her life. The themes emphasize in the novel are, societal expectations, love, heartbreak, gender roles, personal development etc. In the end, the protagonist comes to peace with her life holding close to the belief that everything happens for a reason, which will ultimately lead her to the true path of happiness.



Courtesy: www.amazon.in

The One You Cannot Have, a page turning romantic novel by Preeti Shenoy, has a captivating narrative revolving around four main characters Aman, Shruti, Anjali, and Rishabh. Aman and Shruti were inseparable and so much in love during college, but because of Shruti's mother's illness she unexpectedly ended their relationship leaving Aman devastated forcing him to go out of the country. Aman even after his return to India, still longed for Shruti. Shruti also kept Aman's memories close to her heart even though she was married to Rishab. Anjali an independent writer was attracted to Aman, but he resisted himself from reciprocating her feelings back because of his affection towards shruti. The narrative centers on the themes of love, heartbreak, and the struggles one faces while moving on from a past commitment. The novel goes deep into the twists of unrequited love and complex relationships. The story leads to a poignant climax when Aman finally decided to spend his future with Anjali. Shenoy's style of writing and relatable characters reflect on our life, encouraging us to accept the past and move forward even if we have a 'one you cannot have' we met along our path.

It Happens for a Reason explores themes of love, independence, sacrifice, unconventional life choices and personal growth. The protagonist Vee, then just an 18 years old becomes pregnant out of wedlock and decides to have the baby. She sacrifices her promising modelling career, leaves behind her family and cut ties with her child's father to raise the child alone. She moves and starts a new life. After sixteen years Vee is a single mother handling two careers: running a dog-boarding

facility and working as a gym trainer. The story develops when Ankush- father of her child comes into her life again forcing her to confront her past and decisions which resulted in unresolved emotions. The book portrays Vee as a strong, independent woman and the book is famously noted for its vivid descriptions and the strong character development of Vee.

It happens for a reason goes deep into her struggles in a patriarchal society, complexities of unconventional choices and finally to her journey towards self-reliance, and independence.

The One You Cannot Have a modern-day romance novel by Preeti Shenoy which focuses on themes such as unrequited love, complicated relationships and struggles to move on from past relationships. The story revolves around Aman who just can't move on from his once inseparable ex- girlfriend Shruthi even though she is married to someone else. Aman's attempt to start over with Anjali, a woman who loves him deeply comes in vain when he realize that his heart still belonged to Shruthi and he can't move on. The narrative gives a perspective of both Aman - who can't get over Shruthi and Anjali- who struggle to win his heart. The book is praised for its relatable characters as it represents heartbreak, healing and moving on. It also highlights how no matter how we desire, there will always be a one we cannot have and how unresolved issues can have impact in our present life, giving importance to closure.

The One You Cannot Have and *It Happens for a Reason*, one of the notable themes she mentioned is on societal expectations and how it played a role in influencing the characters personal development and social relationships. We can find the main characters Aman and Shruti, who can't seem to find happiness in their current relationships, because of their internal conflict between societal expectations and personal longing. Shruti and Aman were deeply in love but because of some unforeseen circumstances and interference of fate, Shruti had to marry someone else from her community. This emphasized the immense pressure to abide by the traditional marriage norms by marrying within their own communities. Shruti's decision to marry within her own community even though she was deeply in love with Aman is a typical example. Societal expectations prioritize factors like family background, religion, caste, and community over personal desires and love, leading to several unhappy marriages.

The importance of family approval in matters of love and marriage is a significant factor in a typical Indian household. The characters were pressured by their families to make choices that match with their values and expectations, forcing one to surrender their own personal desires.

There is also an unspoken expectation of people to “move on” after a heartbreak. Shruti and Aman are expected to accept their reality by leaving their past behind. However, the author made sure to mention the complexities of this expectation, revealing how past experiences can impact one's personal life and current relationships. The story suggests that moving on isn't that simple and a straightforward process as feelings can be deep and profound and will affect future decisions. Going deep into the novel *It happens for a reason* we can see characters representing societal expectations and conventional expectations.

It happens for a reason tells the story of Vipasha, a rising star in modelling with a socially respectable family background, who faced many sudden challenges in her life due to stubborn decisions. Shenoy's characters often carry qualities like having standard professions, value stability, success, and living within the standards of the society and norms. Through Vipasha's story the author indirectly mentions societal expectations related to career paths. While she is a model, initially her mother gave her disapproval as it was a profession perceived as unconventional, featuring her mother's character as someone who value stability and conventional success. Later, when she became successful in modelling her mother was delighted to boast about her to her social circle. This contrast underscores various expectations on individuals to choose careers that are both financially stable and socially conventional.

The novel is present with a lot of supportive friends and family members, reflecting the societal expectation of individuals expected to rely on their social circles for support. These characters usually give out conventional guidance and advices that go with the standard societal norms, later influencing the protagonist's decision. The novel also emphasizes the societal expectation on how individuals are pressured into carefully considering their decisions to avoid consequences and to make choices that abide with conventional values and expectations. In both the novels, Shenoy explores the pressure one face between individual desires and societal expectations. Her characters are often in dilemma while they are forced to choose between conventional norms and choosing their own happiness. The Novel also gives out the importance of self-awareness and self-resilience, and the courage to challenge societal norms and expectations to find pursuit in our own happiness.

Preeti Shenoy's novels *The One You Cannot Have* and *It Happens for a Reason* seek on various aspects of gender roles and societal expectations. In the novel *The One You Cannot Have* the author explored the inner conflicts within individuals regarding complexities of relationships, especially emphasizing the societal pressures placed upon genders within those relationship. While this novel is not entirely focused on gender roles, it slightly showcases how gender roles can have an impact on individual decisions, when they are in a dilemma to choose between personal desires and conventional norms especially in the matter of extra marital-affair. The novel portrays the expectations placed on women in a patriarchal society like India. Their roles are secondary in social aspects and yet they are expected to be the obedient primary caretakers, maintainers and managers of home, and emotional Anchor that support the family. The female characters can be often seen struggling to choose between their personal desires and societal obligations. Women are often judged more oppressively for not following these norms than men in our society. Since, Men are portrayed as givers and protectors they often get immense pressure to succeed in their careers and maintain a certain financial stability. The novel explores how these expectations can strain a person and eventually lead them to find emotional comfort in connections outside their marriage. The novel highlights the social stigma and judgement upon women for engaging in extra marital-affairs than men even though both the parties are equally responsible. The concept of emotional exhaustion with female characters is presented by the author. They are often expected to bear the burden of emotional well-being and mental health of their partners and family, this force to stop their yearning for personal wishes outside of their domestic roles.

In the novel *It happens for a reason* Author portrays a 'New Woman' concept, a revolutionary ideal that challenged male patriarchy through the character of Vipasha, who makes eccentric choices despite the consequences. She lives independently both emotionally and financially supporting her family, challenging societal norms and gender discrimination.

In conclusion, both novels showcase Preeti Shenoy's ability in crafting engaging stories and portraying characters relatable to the audience. Her skill to add emotional depth while conveying contemporary social issues through her narration, explores the complexities of love and relationships. Both the themes of the stories analyze the relation on how societal expectations shapes individual experiences and how personal growth only occurs when the characters challenge

these expectations. Preeti Shenoy's works represents the contemporary society, highlighting its struggles and social issues.

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