



**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed English Journal

Editorial Board:

Dr. R. Gobinath

Prof. Sharif Atiquzzaman

Dr. Dr. Aravindan Balakrishnan

Dr. Athisayaraj Jebakumar J

Dr. P. Dinakar

Dr.P.Chitra

Dr. M.K. Praseeda

Prof. D. Deepikadevi

Dr. K.Usha Savithri

Dr. D.Solomon

Dr. S.Subash

Dr. K.M. Keerthika

Dr. B. Lingeswaran

Mr. B. Damodhara Prasath

Ms. P. Sherli

International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories (IJELLT) is a peer-reviewed, open access academic journal dedicated to promoting research and scholarship in the fields of English language, literature, and literary theories. Published monthly, IJELLT provides a platform for academicians, scholars, educators, and researchers to present their original work to a global audience. The journal upholds the highest standards of editorial integrity and academic excellence through a rigorous double-blind peer-review process. We welcome a wide range of submissions from theoretical and critical analyses to practical research, creative writing, and pedagogical studies related to English literature and language.

Literary Theories

Fatherhood in Preethi Shenoy's It Happens for a Reason and The Secret Wish list: An Analysis through Mowder's Parent Development Theory

Ms. S. Kavitha, Research Scholar, Department of English, Nehru Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Nehru Gardens, Thirumalayampalayam.

Dr. Ritu Shepherd, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Nehru Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Nehru Gardens, Thirumalayampalayam.

Abstract: This paper explores the delineation of father figures in Preethi Shenoy's The Secret Wish List and It Happens for a Reason. Both the novels depict the complexities of executing the role of the father and their involvement in the development of their daughters' identities, decisions, choices and emotional development. The portrayal of fathers in the novels of Shenoy showcase their unwavering devotion for their off-spring fueled not by duty but out of pure love. This study analyses a detailed critical analysis of the father figures in The Secret Wish List and It Happens for a Reason, examining through the lens of Parent Development Theory by Mowder (1997) and it also reflects on the crucial aspect of fatherhood and the transitional state of father.

Keywords: Delineation, complexities, Fatherhood, Emotional development, Parent development.



IJELLT

**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**

Introduction

“Dads are most ordinary men turned by love into heroes, adventurers, story-tellers, and singers of song.”- Pam Brown. Indian literature portrayed fatherhood as begetter or as a resource, moral authority, and patriarchal power with less emotional connect with their wards. Fatherhood has become one of the indispensable topics of intense discussion in the present era due to the socio-cultural transitions in the 21st century. Literary portrayals of fatherhood are also shifting from phase to phase from rigid, stern outlook to supportive and understanding phase of fathers. Preeti Shenoy, a leading voice in contemporary Indian popular fiction, uses father-daughter dynamics to explore themes of repression, emotional trauma, and eventual liberation. This study presents a detailed critical analysis of the father figures in *The Secret Wish List* and *It Happens for a Reason*, examining how Shenoy critiques traditional masculinity and envisions newer, more empathetic paradigms of fatherhood. Shenoy intricately weaves father-daughter dynamics to reflect the evolving yet rigid family structures in Indian middle-class society through the lens of Parent Development Theory.

An Overview of Parent Development Theory/Theoretical Framework: Parent Development Theory (Mowder, 1997)

Parent Development Theory (PDT) is a theory that concentrates on psychological role of parenting with multidimensional characteristics. Mower’s PDT states that operative parenting entails the developing nature of parenting and list out five essential core dimensions: Bonding (emotional connection and affection), Discipline (guiding behavior and setting limits), Education (supporting learning and moral development), General Welfare and Protection (ensuring safety and well-being), and Responsivity (being attuned and adaptable to the child’s needs). These attributes have significant impact in the growth of the child’s over all well-being. Parents need to be tuned according to the behavioral change and personal growth of the child. Mowder’s theory provides a theoretical framework for the parents and also suggests guidance that ultimately promotes a strong healthy relationships and family bond.

Literature Review

The Effects of Involved Fatherhood on Families, and How Fathers can be Supported both at the Workplace and in the Home by Scott Behson, Nathan Robbins analyse the role of a father and his involvement on children, family, workplace etc. His multifaceted role as a teacher, mentor and guide help children to gain social skills, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social development. The study has identified certain barriers like employment demands, maternal gatekeeping, gender norms, and policy gaps. It also discusses on low-income and nonresident fathers, including court custody biases and economic barriers. The researcher's advocate certain policy reforms to have a balanced parenting.

Background of the Study

Indian Literature has woven the image of fatherhood with the traditional touch and an embryonic facet in Indian society that emphasize the importance of parenthood and father- child relationship. The role of fathers in Indian context and in modern India are also tinted. Fatherhood in Indian literature has traditionally been characterized by authority, sacrifice, and control. It mirrors the nation's patriarchal structure, where the father stands as a symbol of order and moral rectitude. In modern fiction, however, this archetype is undergoing transformation. Preeti Shenoy, in particular, presents fatherhood not as a static role but as a complex emotional and psychological force that deeply affects the identity of her female protagonists. Through characters like Diksha's and Vipasha's fathers, Shenoy explores the rigidity, silence, estrangement, and potential redemption inherent in father-daughter dynamics.

The role of a father in the novels

The role of a father in the novels *The Secret Wish List* and *It Happens for a Reason* are taken for the study. Former represents the middle-class father who does not priorities the family and the later picturises on the upper class self-concerned father who always focus on his business than his family. In the novel *The Secret Wish List* the protagonist, Diksha is forced to follow the traditional norms of the family. The father is depicted as rigid and adamant character in nature. Diksha is not able to express her ideas, feelings and even thoughts to her parents'. In *It Happens for a Reason*, the mother is very stern and stubborn in nature, she wants to seek the attention of the society and she wishes to show off her societal status. She is very much bothered about the society than her daughter. She is always self-oriented and she never expresses her love for her daughter nor the least care when her daughter is pregnant. Vipasha didn't get the attention at all. Even her friend's mother takes care of her during her post pregnancy. Pregnancy period is the significant face in for any girl's and they long for their mother's love. Despite these expectations, the mother of Viphasha never bothers even to visit her daughter.

Unconditional love

Fathers' never show his love and attention outwardly. We always acknowledge sacrifices of the mother because she used to register it in our mind by reiterating it. Father's love is unseen. There are fathers who are very much concerned on their off springs particularly, daughters are attached to their father than mother. This happens in almost all the family. Different types of parenting are seen all over the world, the same way we could see different types of fathers as well. The father takes the role of a parent, teacher, friends, and well-wishers and so on. We could see the authoritative father who wants everything to happen on time and according to his wish. Disciplined father has the expectation on his sons and daughters and enforces it as a law in their home. The children are able to accept it when they are young but once when they grow up, they are not able to accept or adjust to the wish of the father.

Fatherhood in It Happens for a Reason and The Secret Wish list: A Parent Development Theory Perspective

It Happens for a Reason revolves around the protagonist Vipasha (Vee), a single mother raising her son Aryan after being recklessly ignored by Ankush, the biological father. She strives hard to take care of her son and they both had a pleasant bond between them till the arrival of Ankush. Ankush turn back into their lives and Aryan is fascinated towards his father's fame and richness but still Ankush has failed in his responsibilities as a father and fails to fulfill the needs of the son. Hence, there is no bonding between the father and son. By rejecting Vee's pregnancy and exiting, he forfeits the chance to build emotional ties with Aryan. His absence is not circumstantial but chosen:

He didn't want the baby. He wanted me to get rid of it. (It Happens for a Reason, Shenoy, 2014)

This rejection denies Aryan the emotional security that paternal bonding could provide.

The Secret Wishlist follows Diksha, trapped in a controlling marriage to Sandeep, with whom she has a young son. While the novel focuses on Diksha's personal awakening, Sandeep's fatherhood reveals significant failures across PDT dimensions.

Sandeep maintains an emotionally distant relationship with both wife and child. He prioritizes social respectability over emotional connection, offering minimal affection. His failure at bonding creates a cold, transactional family environment:

“He didn’t really listen... he just wanted things done his way.” (The Secret Wishlist, Shenoy, 2012)

Discipline, per PDT, involves consistent guidance and boundary-setting. Vee alone disciplines Aryan. Ankush’s long absence means he has no authority or credibility in setting limits upon return. His attempt to “parent” years later is superficial and unearned, creating awkward tension rather than genuine guidance.

Sandeep embodies authoritarian, not authoritative, discipline. He imposes rules rigidly, demands obedience, and allows no negotiation. PDT emphasizes guidance that is consistent yet flexible; Sandeep’s rigidity damages emotional security, fostering fear rather than respect.

Education in PDT encompasses supporting learning and understanding, including moral and social interpretation. Ankush offers none of this. He is absent through Aryan’s formative years, ceding the entire educational role to Vee. His re-entry does not meaningfully include mentoring or teaching.

While the novel does not focus heavily on explicit teaching, Sandeep’s general demeanor signals neglect of educational support. He models inflexibility and emotional neglect rather than moral reasoning or empathy, providing no foundation for the child’s emotional learning.

While Ankush later claims concern for Aryan’s welfare, this belated interest is hollow. During critical early years, he provides neither financial nor emotional protection. Vee alone ensures Aryan’s welfare, highlighting Ankush’s failure to embody this parental dimension. (General Welfare and Protection)

Superficially, Sandeep ensures material welfare. Yet true welfare in PDT also includes emotional well-being and family safety. His emotional neglect and controlling behavior undermine these, leaving his wife and child feeling stifled and alienated. Perhaps Ankush’s greatest failure lies in responsiveness. He refuses to recognize or respond to Vee’s needs as a partner or to Aryan’s as a child. His late attempts to reconcile lack true responsiveness—they are centered on his own guilt and desire for absolution rather than understanding Aryan’s perspective. Sandeep is fundamentally unresponsive. He neither notices nor cares about his wife’s distress or his child’s evolving needs. His parenting remains static, failing to adapt as the child grows or circumstances change.

Thematic Implications

Through Ankush's underdeveloped parenting characteristics, Shenoy critiques the social acceptability of paternal abandonment. By showcasing Ankush's failure in bonding, discipline, education, welfare, and responsiveness, the novel challenges patriarchal norms that permit fathers to evade responsibility while mothers absorb the full emotional and logistical burden of parenting. These characteristics include both positive and negative parenting behaviors and are comprised of bonding, discipline, education, general welfare and protection, responsiveness, sensitivity, and negativity. Sandeep's failures in all PDT dimensions critique patriarchal models of fatherhood that equate provision with parenting while ignoring emotional labor. Shenoy reveals that material security without bonding, responsiveness, or flexible guidance is insufficient, if not damaging.

Comparative Analysis

Both Ankush and Sandeep fail to develop Mowder's parenting characteristics, but in contrasting ways: **Ankush:** Abandons all parenting dimensions through absence. Bonding, discipline, education, welfare, and responsiveness are ceded entirely to the mother. **Sandeep:** Present but rigid and unresponsive. Offers material welfare but fails at bonding, responsiveness, and flexible discipline. Their shared outcome is a damaged family dynamic where the mother bears the full weight of parenting. Shenoy uses these failures to critique Indian social norms that tolerate either paternal absence or authoritarian control.

Conclusion

Applying Mowder's Parent Development Theory (1997) to Preethi Shenoy's *It Happens for a Reason* and *The Secret Wishlist* reveals consistent patterns of paternal failure across critical parenting characteristics. Both novels portray fathers who neglect bonding, discipline, education, welfare, and responsiveness, though they do so in distinct ways. Ankush's abandonment and Sandeep's authoritarianism represent two sides of the same cultural coin: models of fatherhood that fail to recognize parenting as an evolving, multidimensional, emotionally engaged role. Shenoy's fiction thus challenges traditional Indian patriarchal expectations by exposing their emotional costs to women and children alike. By highlighting the need for fathers to develop and embody these core characteristics, her work advocates for a more responsive, equitable, and emotionally attuned vision of parenthood in contemporary India.

Fatherhood Is a Privilege, Not Just a Responsibility

References

1. Mowder, B. A. (1997). Parent Development Theory: Understanding Parents, Parenting Perceptions, and Parenting Behaviors. *Journal of Early Childhood and Infant Psychology*, 3, 45–56.
2. Mowder, B. A., Rubinson, F., & Yasik, A. (2002). Parenting Perceptions Questionnaire (PPQ): Development and Use. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 11(3), 375–389.
3. Mowder, Barbara A. “Parent Development Theory: Understanding Parents, Parenting Perceptions, and Parenting Behaviors.” *Journal of Early Childhood and Infant Psychology*, vol. 3, 1997, pp. 45–56.
4. Shenoy, P. (2012). *The Secret Wishlist*. Westland Ltd.
5. Shenoy, P. (2014). *It Happens for a Reason*. Westland Ltd.



**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**