

CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN PREETI SHENOY'S A HUNDRED LITTLE FLAMES

Dr.M. Krishna Veni,

Guest Lecturer in English,

Rani Anna Government college for Women,

Tirunelveli – 8,

Mail Id: kvenirajendran07@gamil.com

Abstract

Postmodern Indian society reflects a hybrid culture. Contemporary writers contribute their writings for the welfare of society. India is a country surrounded by vast resources. Indian society is woven with classical and modern traditions. Preeti Shenoy is an eminent and well-known Indian author. Shenoy's "A Hundred Little Flames" clearly depicts Indian tradition, dividing the modern and traditional ways of life. The generation gap is elegantly visible through the characters. Contemporary Indian novels in English frequently delve into diverse themes, including social issues, that reflect the complexities of modern Indian life and culture. Novelists like Preeti Shenoy often explore pressing contemporary issues such as globalization, urbanization, caste, gender, and political corruption, offering a critical perspective on Indian society. Preeti Shenoy's *A Hundred Little Flames* provides a nuanced portrayal of modern Indian society. The novel skillfully captures the erosion of traditional values in urban life, as embodied by the protagonist's inner conflict between conservative roots and modern aspirations. This paper seeks to explore the cultural representation in *A Hundred Little Flames*, examining the intricate dynamics among tradition, modernity, and urbanization in contemporary India.

Keywords: conservative, modernity , urbanization.

Preeti Shenoy is a multifaceted Indian author, speaker, and illustrator. Shenoy began her writing career as a blogger and later published her debut book, *34 Bubblegums and Candies*, a collection of short stories inspired by real-life incidents. Shenoy's subsequent novel, *A Hundred Little Flames*, was published in November 2017. The tension between traditional values and modern city life is indeed a recurring theme in Indian English literature. Many authors have explored this theme, reflecting the complexities of India's rapid modernization and urbanization. Some notable examples of Indian English literature that explore this theme include: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). These authors, among others, have delved into the tensions between traditional values and modern city life, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that arise from India's rapid transformation.

Preeti Shenoy's *A Hundred Little Flames* (2017) explores the protagonist's struggles to balance traditional values with modern city life. This theme continues to be relevant in contemporary Indian English literature, reflecting the ongoing negotiations between tradition and modernity in Indian society. The landscape is a vital element in evoking a sense of peaceful life. Preeti Shenoy's vivid depiction of Thekka Madom village scenes, with its lush green surroundings and serene ambiance, is exemplary. In Preeti Shenoy's words, with rains, the greenery took on a new hue hitherto unseen, and transformed the scene on front of Gopal Shankar in a water colour painting. The miles and miles of green paddy field stretched out like carpets, contrasting against the endless light blue sky dotted with fluffy white clouds, till the horizon. It was a picture perfect setting, ideal for advertising Kerala as God's Own Country. Anyone who arrived here as a tourist would gasp in delight when they first set eyes on the picturesque scene (HLF17).

Ayan, who was brought up in the city, visits Thekka Madom for the sake of his father, Jairaj. Ayan initially feels a deep sense of alienation when he visits his grandfather's rural village. The sounds, sights, and ways of life in the village feel foreign to him, even though, paradoxically, it is a part of his heritage. This feeling of being an outsider is compounded by his urban mindset, which clashes with the simplicity and traditions of rural life. As a result, the disconnect between his urban upbringing and his rural roots creates a profound sense of confusion, forcing him to re-examine his identity and values. Ayan's disconnection between his past and present leaves him in a state of existential confusion. He struggles to recapture the fragrance of his past, with ancestral roots, cherished memories, and once-familiar sensations now elusive.

Ayan finds himself torn between two worlds that no longer seem to fully accommodate him. The rapid transformation of the technological world exacerbates the mental dilemma of Ayan and his grandfather, Gopal Shankar. Thekke Madom stands as a poignant symbol of cultural identity, embodying the deep-seated traditions and values that have defined Ayan's family for generations. This ancestral home serves as a testament to the family's rich heritage, with its roots in rural customs, rituals, and the timeless ways of the older generation. For Ayan's grandfather, Thekke Madom transcends its physical structure, representing a continuum of tradition, a sacred space where the legacy of their forefathers is cherished and preserved. Steeped in memories, customs, and a profound sense of belonging. Thekke Madom epitomizes an unwavering allegiance to tradition, community, and familial ties that have been painstakingly passed down through generations. Yet, this cultural identity also underscores the inherent tension between preserving one's heritage and embracing the inexorable transformations of the modern world. Ultimately, Ayan's journey of self-discovery is inextricably linked to his evolving relationship with Thekke Madom. As he navigates the complexities of

his identity, he must confront the challenge of honoring his past while forging a path that is distinctly his own, striking a delicate balance between tradition and transformation.

A long, paved cement driveway, flanked on both sides by overgrown hibiscus bushes which were in full bloom, led to Thekke Madom, the ancestral home, where Gopal Shankar and his siblings had grown up in a large joint family along with their many cousins. Little by little, the joint family had disintegrated, with members moving away to different cities to make a living (HLF 19).

Ayan's immersion in urban life exposes him to a myriad of modern ideas, practices, and values, sparking a crisis of cultural identity. The city's diverse lifestyles, career aspirations, and contemporary societal norms collide with the traditional values he was raised with, leaving him perplexed. As he becomes increasingly enamored with urban culture, he begins to question his own beliefs and practices, torn between the comfort of familiarity and the allure of modernity. The city represents a realm of freedom, progress, and opportunity, while his rural roots emphasize the importance of community, tradition, and family ties. This dichotomy creates a profound sense of tension within Ayan, as he struggles to reconcile his desire for a modern identity with his loyalty to the customs and rituals of his upbringing. The difference in values between Ayan and his grandfather highlights the significant cultural changes that have occurred over time. Ayan's grandfather is deeply rooted in tradition and sees cultural practices as sacred and unchanging. In contrast, Ayan, who has been influenced by city life and modern ideas, questions the relevance of these practices. This clash in perspectives creates tension between them. The older and younger generations have different views on life. The older generation values tradition and continuity, while the younger generation prioritizes progress and personal freedom. Ayan's changing perspective clashes with his grandfather's, making it hard for them to understand each other. Ayan sees his grandfather's traditional ways as limiting, while his grandfather thinks Ayan is abandoning their heritage. This conflict reflects a common struggle: balancing traditional values with modern societal norms. Over time, Ayan gains a deeper understanding of his grandfather's perspective and its emotional significance.

In *A Hundred Little Flames*, the urban-rural divide plays a significant role in Ayan's identity crisis. Raised in the city, Ayan is accustomed to a fast-paced, modern lifestyle. However, his visits to his grandfather's rural village introduce him to a slower, more communal way of life, where relationships and traditions matter more than material success. This clash between two worlds forces Ayan to reevaluate his assumptions about both environments. He struggles with the constraints of rural life, yet appreciates its simplicity and connectedness. As he navigates this divide, Ayan must confront the limitations and strengths of each

environment and decide where he truly belongs. Ayan's family struggles to preserve traditional practices amidst modernization, reflecting a broader issue: how to honor the past while embracing the future. As family members adopt modern ways, cherished customs and rituals fade, creating a sense of cultural erosion. Ayan feels disconnected from his past, while his grandfather mourns the loss of traditions.

The conflict between Ayan and his grandfather highlights the generational struggle to balance cultural continuity with modernity's allure. However, as Ayan navigates urbanization's pull, he realizes the importance of preserving traditions, not just as customs, but as markers of shared history and identity. This realization is a turning point for Ayan, helping him understand the significance of cultural practices. Ayan's grandfather feels frustrated and disconnected from his children, who have adopted a modern way of living that he struggles to understand. His daughter has not visited him in years, and his son, who lives in the city, manages everything remotely, including his father's health and the upkeep of the family home, often relying on phone calls to communicate. As Grandfather Gopal Shankar so eloquently expresses, "people like to live in matchboxes, where there is not even a piece of land. you should always live in a structure where you can step out and feel Mother Earth, not be half -suspended like Trishanku in the sky" (HLF 20).

In contrast to his father's materialistic pursuits, Ayan develops a deep appreciation for traditional family values and heritage. He feels a strong sense of responsibility towards his grandfather and wants to care for him. When his father suggests sending his grandfather to the Ashrayam Mental Hospital, Ayan vehemently opposes the idea. Additionally, he prevents his father from selling their ancestral home, Thakka Madom. Through Ayan's character, "A Hundred Little Flames" sheds light on the plight of elderly individuals, highlighting the abandonment and neglect they often face. As Preeti Shenoy poignantly notes, "We have a Senior Citizens Wing. They are mostly patients abandoned by their families" (HLF 152).

Rohini is portrayed as a strong-willed, independent, and free-spirited individual who inspires Ayan, the protagonist, to re-evaluate his life and priorities. She is a symbol of empowerment and embodies the qualities of confidence, resilience, and determination. Rohini, a strong-willed and independent woman, inspires Ayan with her passion for cultural camps and her courage to challenge societal norms. Unlike Ayan, who struggles with traditional expectations, Rohini is confident in her choices and remains true to herself. Her friendship with Ayan broadens his perspective, encouraging him to question his own values and find his own path. Through Rohini's character, the novel highlights the importance of individuality, self-awareness, and embracing one's true identity. Ayan's confrontation with his father marks a significant milestone in his growth and newfound confidence. As he boldly asserts, "All my life I have trusted you... you

BETRAYED that TRUST... YOU HAVE LOST me FOREVER" (HLF 354). Ayan demonstrates his ability to stand up for himself and set boundaries, signifying a profound transformation from a submissive and obedient son to a confident and independent individual.

The cultural representation in *A Hundred Little Flames* is poignant in its portrayal of Ayan's journey towards self-discovery and his grandfather's steadfast adherence to tradition. The bond between Ayan and his grandfather serves as a powerful symbol of the importance of preserving cultural heritage and traditional values. Though Ayan's grandfather passes away, his legacy lives on through Ayan, who comes to appreciate the value of their cultural roots and the importance of staying connected to his heritage and community. Ultimately, the novel highlights the significance of intergenerational relationships and the need to honor and preserve cultural traditions.

References:

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org › wiki › Gener.](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generations) Jan 2021

Shenoy, Preeti. *A Hundred Little Flames*. Thomson Press (India) Ltd, 2017.