

Article

Preeti Shenoy's Psychological Approach in *Life is What You Make It*: A Study

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Abstract: Indian English fiction is a rich and diverse literary genre that reflects the country's complex cultural, social, and historical landscape. From early writers to emerging fiction writers, writers have made significant contributions to the literary world, bringing fresh perspectives and engaging with contemporary issues. Preeti Shenoy is a best-selling author known for novels that explore complex relationships and human emotions. Her novel, *Life Is What You Make It*, by Preeti Shenoy, explores themes of love, mental health, and the challenges of young adulthood. The present research paper focuses on the psychological approach of the novelist in the novel, which is significant in exploring the mental health journey of the protagonist, Ankita.

Keywords: Psychological approach; self-discovery; pressures; mental health

Introduction

Indian English fiction is a rich and diverse literary genre that reflects the country's complex cultural, social, and historical landscape. From the works of early writers such as R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand to contemporary authors like Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh, Indian English fiction has undergone significant evolution. Indian English fiction has gained international recognition, offering readers a unique perspective on India's complexities and diversity. It continues to evolve, reflecting the country's changing social, cultural, and political landscape. Emerging Indian English novelists are making significant contributions to the literary world, bringing fresh perspectives and engaging with contemporary issues. Some notable writers are Vaibhavi Sonawane, Bhavik Sarkhedi, Novoneel Chakraborty, Anita Nair, Preeti

Shenoy, and many more. These emerging writers are pushing the boundaries of Indian English literature, experimenting with new styles, themes, and genres. They explore complex social issues, cultural identities, and personal narratives, offering readers a unique perspective on India's diverse landscape. Some notable themes and styles include magical realism while blending fantasy and reality to create unique narratives, psychological depth which explores characters' inner worlds and emotions, cultural identity where we find examining India's diverse cultures, traditions, and histories, and social commentary addressing pressing issues like poverty, inequality, and social justice. Overall, emerging Indian English novelists are enriching the literary landscape, offering fresh perspectives and innovative storytelling. Preeti Shenoy is a best-selling author known for novels that explore complex relationships and human emotions.

About Preeti Shenoy in brief:

Preeti Shenoy has authored fifteen bestsellers, ranking as the highest-selling author in India. Her influence extends beyond the literary world, as she has been featured on the Forbes longlist of the most influential celebrities in India. Preeti has represented India at several international literature festivals, including those in Birmingham, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi. Her exceptional achievements and contributions to literature have been recognized and celebrated by major media outlets, including BBC World, Cosmopolitan, The Hindu, Verve, and The Times of India. Simplicity and readability are her hallmarks for the books, which tackle serious issues such as mental health, gender inequality, socio-economic class divides, relationship dynamics, and challenges faced by young adults.

Preeti has numerous awards for her literary work, including the Popular Choice Fiction Award 2021 by AuthER Awards from the Times of India, as well as the Most Popular Self-Help Book of 2021 by Amazon India. Additionally, she has been awarded the 'Indian of the Year' award for 2017, and the Business Excellence Award by the New Delhi Institute of Management. Preeti's literary accomplishments are not limited to full-length books but also include short stories and poetry that have been published in magazines such as Conde Nast and Verve. Additionally, she wrote a weekly column in The Financial Chronicle for many years.

Psychological Analysis of *Life Is What You Make It*:

Life Is What You Make It is a novel by Preeti Shenoy that explores themes of love, mental health, and the challenges of young adulthood. The story follows the life of a young woman named Ankita, who navigates her aspirations, relationships, and the pressures of societal expectations. The narrative delves into Ankita's struggles with her mental health, particularly as she faces the pressures of college life, family expectations, and personal ambitions. The novel emphasizes the significance of self-acceptance and the influence of choices on one's life trajectory.

In this novel by Preeti Shenoy, we are introduced to Ankita Sharma, a bright and ambitious young woman on the cusp of a promising future. Her life takes a drastic turn when she is diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, a mental illness that completely

disrupts her life. The story takes us through her struggles with the illness, her time in a mental health facility, and her journey towards recovery.

Ankita's battle with Bipolar Disorder is not just a physical one, but a personal and emotional one as well. She has to cope with the stigma attached to mental illness, her feelings of shame and helplessness, and the fear of losing those she loves. As her condition worsens, she is forced to abandon her dreams and academic pursuits, and her relationships begin to crumble. During her time in the mental health facility, Ankita experiences some of her darkest days. She is filled with self-doubt and despair, and at one point, even attempts to take her own life. However, in this lowest moment, she finds the strength to fight back. She starts to understand her illness, accepts her condition, and begins to take steps towards recovery. After her release from the facility, Ankita starts her life over. She enrolls in a new college, makes new friends, and finds love. Despite the challenges she faces, she refuses to let her illness define her. She learns to manage her condition, takes her medication regularly, and starts to rebuild her life and her dreams. It is aptly commented that,

"Even amid the darkest circumstances in life, if people have hope, light will appear. Through Ankita's character, the readers understand that one can find strength and meaning in any circumstances, even when things fall apart."
(Niranjani)

In *Life Is What You Make It*, the psychological approach is significant in exploring the protagonist, Ankita's, mental health journey. The novel addresses issues such as anxiety, depression, and the stigma surrounding mental health, emphasizing the importance of seeking help. Ankita's character experiences significant growth as she confronts her internal struggles. Her journey reflects the complexities of human emotions and the resilience that accompanies them.

The pressure from family and society plays a crucial role in Ankita's psychological state. The narrative critiques these external pressures and their impact on individual identity. The story illustrates various coping strategies Ankita employs, showcasing both healthy and unhealthy methods of dealing with stress and trauma. The theme of self-acceptance and understanding one's identity is central. Ankita's journey underscores the significance of introspection and personal development. The dynamics of Ankita's relationships, including friendships and romantic involvements, are examined, illustrating how they influence her mental health and self-perception. Aarti Muthuvetrivel, who observes it,

"The novel addresses the social stigma surrounding mental health by portraying the stereotypes and biases associated with mental illness, and not only that, it also talks about the resilience and motivation from the surrounding that helps the protagonist to recover. It shows how open communication and empathy are important and will support and motivate the patient to push them towards the path of recovery and a new life." (p. 79)

Overall, the psychological approach in the novel provides a nuanced understanding of the protagonist's struggles and emphasizes the message that life can be shaped positively through awareness and self-acceptance.

Techniques in the novel

Preeti Shenoy employs several techniques to present Ankita's psychology in *Life Is What You Make It*. Here are some notable methods:

1. Internal Monologue

Shenoy employs internal monologue to explore Ankita's thoughts and feelings, providing insight into her mental state and enabling readers to understand her internal conflicts and emotions more deeply.

2. Character Dialogue

Conversations with friends, family, and therapists reveal Ankita's struggles and perspectives, highlighting her relationships and their impact on her psyche.

3. Flashbacks

The use of flashbacks helps to explore Ankita's past experiences, shedding light on her motivations and the origins of her mental health issues.

4. Symbolism

Objects and events throughout the narrative symbolize Ankita's journey, such as the significance of places she visits or milestones she achieves, reflecting her emotional growth.

5. Descriptive Language

Vivid descriptions of Ankita's feelings and environments create an immersive experience, connecting readers with her emotional landscape.

6. Contrasting Characters

The presence of contrasting characters highlights Ankita's struggles, showcasing different responses to similar challenges and emphasizing her unique journey.

7. Realistic Scenarios

Shenoy incorporates relatable situations that resonate with young adults, making Ankita's challenges authentic and relevant.

8. Evolving Perspective

Ankita's changing outlook throughout the novel illustrates her psychological development, showcasing how her experiences shape her understanding of life and her own identity. Evolving perspective is presented by Dr. Kishor Kumar Gaikwad in his paper in the following way,

"Ankita emerges as a symbol of resilience and personal growth. The novel effectively portrays how confronting inner demons and embracing vulnerability can lead to profound self-awareness and empowerment. Shenoy's narrative

highlights the importance of mental health awareness and emphasizes the transformative power of self-acceptance and determination." (p. 45)

These techniques work together to create a rich psychological portrait of Ankita, making her journey relatable and impactful for readers.

Conclusion:

Today, the present century is considered the age of psychological problems. People are facing the challenge of various psychological disorders. We are unable to adapt to the increasing demands and tensions of life. The novelist presents such a situation through the story of Ankita. The novel also provides a solution in the form of our appropriate choices. The title suggests the same. So, psychological problems are created by us only. We must take care of ourselves when making life choices. Preeti Shenoy aptly describes the present situation of human life through a psychological approach in the story of Ankita.

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