

Literature as a Medium for Mental Health Awareness in Preeti Shenoy's, "Life is what you make it"

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ABSTRACT

This research article focuses into the realm of "Literature as a Medium for Mental Health Awareness" with a focus on Preeti Shenoy's novel, "Life is What You Make It." This study explores how the literature works as a potential catalyst for raising awareness about the complexities of mental health issues and the stigmas that surround them. Through a comprehensive analysis, this research investigates the character Ankita Sharma, the protagonist of the novel who embarks an intricate journey with the ups and lows of living with the bipolar disorder and how he author uses literature as a medium to humanizes the experience of individuals facing mental health challenges and their struggles, resilience and recoveries around the stigmatized environment. The research also gives an insight to the idea of dealing with the mental health challengers how to support and encourage them with the transformational power of empathy.

Keypoints: mental health awareness, bipolar disorder, resilience, recovery, society stigmas, psychological literature, "*Life is what you make it*", Preeti Shenoy.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health disorders have been seen in a negative perception around the world. In the ancient ages, mental illness is something considered to be the moral punishment or an evil spirit because of the sin that humanity made. These superstitious beliefs led to the lack of awareness and negligence on the mental health. But as education progress with the inventing of technology, government policies, Institutional reforms, and treatments increases the awareness on mental health that helps the society to eliminate the stigmas. With the greater understanding of mental illness, it allows people to recognize and help people with dealing with anxiety, depression or other conditions that affect their well-being. This also includes the self-realization of their own mental health conditions.

This research article explores the novel "*Life is what you make it*" by Preeti shenoy as a literature on awareness about mental health

Preeti Shenoy is an Indian author who often explores on the themes related to relationships, personal growth and mental health. She is a strong advocate for mental health which she used her writing to destigmatize mental health issues which has made a lasting impact in the literary world and beyond. Her work, "*Life is what you make it*" is considered as one of the most significant psychological fictional work of Preeti Shenoy.

"*Life is what you make it*" can be regarded as a literary piece of work that talks about mental health. The novel not just gives a compelling story but also serves as a piece of work that highlights various aspects of mental health awareness. The novel dwells into the life of the protagonist, Ms. Ankita Sharma, who went through the challenges of bipolar disorder. The author portrays the struggles realistically rather than sugar coating it. The novel humanizes the experiences, emotions and vulnerabilities of a mentally affected person and the struggles they went through to the path of recovery. The novel talks addresses the social stigma surrounding mental health as 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 is important and will support and motivate the patient to push them towards the path of recovery and a new life.

Ankita's Mental Health Journey

The novel *"Life is what you make it"* follows the story of the life of Ankita Sharma, a young woman with dreams and aspirations. However her life turns upside down when she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a mental health condition. The story follows Ankita from her teenage years to adulthood as she navigates the complexities of life, relationships and her own mental health. As a bright and ambitious young woman who excels in her academics as well as a woman with the dreams of a successful career. However her mental health condition turns her life upside down. The novel looks into her struggles due to her condition, the challenges she faces, the emotions she felt

Throughout the narrative, the book addresses the stigma associated with mental health issues, portraying how society often misunderstands and discriminates against individuals with such conditions. It also underscores the importance of family and friends in providing support and understanding. This is a story of resilience, personal growth, and the power of the human spirit and the importance of seeking help and treatment for mental health conditions, offering a message of hope and empowerment. The novel serves as a valuable contribution to mental health awareness, promoting open dialogues about these issues and inspiring readers to make the most of their lives despite the challenges they may face.

"I felt disgusted with myself for pleading this way with my parents. But the dread and fear of being admitted at a mental hospital made me overcome my reluctance and I pleaded again."-(121)

Ankita, confesses, highlighting the initial reluctance to acknowledge her mental health challenges. She expresses a deep internal conflict and depression and the desperation to get out of this. The protagonist's feeling of disgust stems from the vulnerability of pleading with their parents, revealing the sense of shame or weakness. The dread and fear associated with the possibility of being admitted to a mental hospital underscores the stigma and societal misconceptions surrounding mental health issues. The reluctance to plead again reflects the internal struggles between the narrator's pride and the urgent need for help. These lines indicate her emotional turmoil, societal pressures and internal battles that often people face when dealing with mental health challenges.

I felt a little bit like a prisoner but the only place that I was trapped in, was inside my own mind. The worst thing was that there was no escape.- (111)

Ankita expresses a profound sense of entrapment within her own mind like a cage. Here, the feeling of being a prisoner implies a sense of confinement and limitation, and the internal struggle with mental health. The absence of escape accentuates the intensity of this emotional confinement, indicating the challenges of dealing with one's thoughts and emotions. These lines encapsulate the isolating nature of mental health struggles, conveying a poignant message about the internal battles individuals may face and the quest for mental freedom and well-being.

Bipolar disorder can be so severely crippling that it can result in damaged relationships, poor job or academic performance and even suicide.- (155)

The mood swings affected not only the challenges Ankita but also the relationship around her. Her family, her friends and even her partner have to suffer because of it. The quoted line highlights the impact of bipolar disorder on the various aspects of one's individual life. The term severely crippling shows the depth of the impact that affects the core of her relationship along with her career that her future holds. The mood swings of the bipolar disorder patient can cause a strain which may affect the interpersonal dynamics. These mood swings can lead to the consequences of one's attempt to harm oneself which Ankita mentioned as suicide.

Bipolar disorder is a serious brain disorder that causes dramatic shifts in moods, energy levels, attitudes and ability to carry out everyday tasks. It is very different from the normal mood changes that everybody goes through from time to time. It develops typically in late adolescence or early adulthood.

These lines, the author provides an insightful explanation of bipolar disorder. This story talk about the mental health challenge especially focuses on the bipolar disorder, one of the severe mental health conditions. The author uses the literature as a medium to convey the impact of mental health care and to bring awareness about this condition to the people. Because still now, there is a stigma around the mental health care which results in the poor care or a severe damage to the lives of people regarding their mental level. This fictional story acts as a mental health advocacy and

creates awareness on the condition of bipolar disorder and also a solution on how to overcome. It also gives an insight to the people on how to encourage or support the people who are troubling.

He was offering me the last vestiges of hope and I was clinging to it with the desperation of a drowning person.- (125)

“It is an illness like any other illness. See, when you have a fracture, you go to an orthopaedic, right? And when you have a toothache you go to a Dentist? In the same way, when you have an illness of the mind, you come to us. People have a stigma about it. They do not understand the severity of it. People simply cannot snap out of it, they need to be treated in order to get better,” –(124)

The author chooses not only to bring awareness to the people but also to motivate the mental health challengers by showing the support which makes them resilient towards the idea of this disorder. The protagonist Ankita who at first felt insecure to seek help later on was convinced to see a professional psychiatrist, who plays a major role in changing her life. Ankita and her family, at first thought that this is something serious and yet shameful later on understood the stigma they have been facing and the professional help made them a lot to see this as a common illness that needs treatment like others. Ankita become a lot stronger with the treatment and her parents become more and more supportive to help her to go through.

Ankita went on to gain six more academic degrees. Her thirst for knowledge was insatiable. It was as though she could not get enough of reading and as though she could not get enough of academics. One of her degrees included a Masters in Art therapy. Along the way she met a kind, sensitive man, fell in love and got married to him. He fully understood what she had gone through and admired her all the more for it.- 153

Here this excerpt, the narrative unfolds to reveal Ankita’s remarkable personal and academic degrees reflects her insatiable thirst for knowledge, portraying education as a source of fulfillment and intellectual nourishment for her. The mention of Ankita obtaining master’s in Art therapy is particularly significant, because art therapy is often used as a therapeutic tool for individuals dealing with mental health challenges, showcasing Ankita’s commitment to her own healing and potentially using her experiences to contribute positively to others.

In essence, this paints a picture of Ankita’s resilience, academic achievements and the transformative power of love and understanding in her life. it hints at the potential for personal growth, healing and the building of meaningful connections even after experiencing the challenges associated with mental health.

CITATIONS

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