

A Study of Mental challenges and the Role of Willpower in Preeti Shenoy's '*Life Is What You Make It*'

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ABSTRACT

Edmund Fuller remarks that in our age “man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problems ----- a conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his way of existence” When people suffer they always suffer as a whole human being. The emotional, cognitive and spiritual suffering of human beings cannot be completely separated from all other kinds of suffering, such as from harmful natural, ecological, political, economic, social and psychological conditions. In reality they interact with each other and influence each other. Human beings do not only suffer from illnesses, physical pain, and the lack of decent opportunities to satisfy their basic vital, social and emotional needs. They also suffer the most when they are not mentally stable and they have none to support and care for. The man of contemporary society has become befuddled, perturbed, disintegrated and alienated soul. The exclusive causes behind these are the suitable gap between what an individual aspires for and the unpleasant reality of what he gains, what he actually is and what he would wish to be taken for. The modern man finds him completely crushed under this psychological war of his inner and outer personality. The marks left on his psyche make him realize both his helplessness and hopelessness. In our times, we suffer not only from wars, persecution isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in our way of existence but also from a psychological disorder. Fiction is the one among the most liked form of literature in the modern society. The theme of mental disorders or mental challenges has also found a place in the fiction of the whole world including Indian English Fiction as well. This short paper is an attempt at making a comprehensive study on the theme of Mental challenges and the Role of Willpower to Overcome as dealt in Preeti Shenoy's novel '*Life is What You Make It*'. It will also be my endeavour to explore various factors which helped in aggravating the mental disorder of the protagonist of the novel. It will also discuss how one's life is affected when going under mental instability.

Key Words; psychological disorder, mental challenges, contemporary, isolation, love, relationship

INTRODUCTION

Love and affection are the familiar themes in Preeti Shenoy's novels. The theme of love and affection cannot be discussed as impeccably by any other writer as by Preeti shenoy. After going through the pages of her novels we discover that relationship, love, friendship, and family all are essential themes in her novels. In the world of English literature she is renowned for her use of romantic elements in her novels but her writings for the most of the time provide us with great lessons of life pertaining to humanity. She was born on 21 December 1971 in India. Her husband's name is Satish Shenoy. They have two children. Naturally she has keen interest in painting and drawing different kinds of pictures. She takes great interest in travelling; taking clicks of various things coming her way and thinks about them with all attention. She actively participates in fitness programmes and performs Yoga Asana. She is famous on social media and she handles so many things proficiently.

She authored many books like:- '*34 Bubblegums and Candies*', '*Life is What you Make it*', '*Tea for Two and a Piece of Cake*', '*The Secret Wish List*', '*The One You Cannot Have*', '*It Happens for a Reason*', '*Why We Love The Way We Do*', '*It's all in the Planets*', '*A Hundred Little Flames*', '*Wake Up , Life is Calling*'. '*The Magic Mindset: How to Find Your Happy Place*' is the latest novel by Preeti Shenoy. Preeti Shenoy is a stupendous writer. She has a deep insight into the subject which she takes to pen. Her lettering style is such that even a lay man can easily read it. When someone goes through the pages of her books, he feels the stories to be real though author always clears that her stories are not based on

real life. But her book “Life Is What You Make it” based on real life as she herself has made it clear in many interviews. Her debut novel ‘34 Bubblegums and Candies’ is a fabulous work, which depicts a pathetic incident. These stories are far from old fashioned family stories.

The most of the books which she authored deal with various aspects of love. Love is a pious and selfless phenomenon yet the lovers have to face a lot of hurdles coming its way. Her love stories abound in ups and downs in the life of the characters, yet by and large she manages to give them a happy ending. Most of her stories are painful, but still we can learn, how to live a cheerful life. Some of these novels deal with love and the rest of them also introduce us with relations and motivational lessons. When we minutely observe Preeti Shenoy’s novels, we come to know that nonetheless her love stories are pathetic, painful and meet with disaster but still her characters never give up. These are not merely love stories but also motivational works that enable us to triumph over the ups and downs of life.

Life is What You Make It is the story of an appealing and intellectually gifted girl. In this book the author not only tells us a love story but she also teaches us good lessons of life. The story revolves around the life journey of the protagonist, Ankita Sharma, from being an intelligent student of the college to the four walls of an asylum. Like most of the youngsters of her age she fell in love but unfortunately circumstances threw her into the well of psychological disorders. She suffered with a mental disorder named bipolar disorder, a disorder associated with episodes of mood swings ranging from depressive lows to manic highs. The symptoms of this disorder are not so much serious in the beginning but they can lead it up to level where the patient starts thinking about suicide and sometimes does so. The protagonist of the novel changes her destiny and defeats this disorder with her strong will power and determination. The whole story revolves around Abhishek and Ankita. It explores that love does not always give happiness and sometimes, we have to face tough and daunting circumstances which make human existence a wretched and miserable affair. Every love story cannot be happy and smooth as there may be so many obstacles in the way of love.

The supreme quality Almighty bestowed upon us is love and it is a mighty feeling itself. It is the pole around which the whole life moves. It is the very basis of life. It is the supreme emotion. It is not limited to human boundaries but it is spread all around in nature. It is a natural phenomenon. But sometimes it brings a lot of problems in the life of human beings and the same happens with Ankita Sharma in this story. In the opening scene of the novel we are introduced to the protagonist who lives with her parents in Kerela and her boyfriend, Vaibhav. But after the transfer of her father she goes to Cochin and starts her graduation from St. Agnes. Vaibhav is her boyfriend and they exchange letters to each other. She is very happy at the new place and with friends and describes everything to Vaibhav about the college. But she is not least aware of the fact that her life is going to take a turn which will change her life entirely. She would have never thought that she would be attracted to someone else and have some deep feelings for him. She comes in contact with Abhishek, a nice boy by nature. Abhishek likes Ankita and has deep desires of love for her. Abhishek respects her, cares for her, obey everything and all of these make Ankita happy and a sense of love is developing towards Abhishek. But on the other hand, she also feels that she is betraying Vaibhav. Abhishek is madly in love with Ankita. He writes a letter to Ankita expressing his intense feelings towards her. Suvi convinces Ankita to meet with Abhishek. Thus, their serious relationship has started. But the relationship does not go long as they are totally different from each other. Ankita is a brilliant and career oriented student and wants to pull off something great in professional life. So career is her priority. But on the other hand, Abhishek is also a good student but he is very possessive and loves Ankita and admits that he can’t live without her. He proposes Ankita for marriage. But there is a turning point awaiting in her life of which even Ankita is not least aware of. Many times a person gets carried away in emotions and takes many decisions, which later change his entire life. She rejects his proposal of marriage; she said “How could I promise? How could I tell that my dreams had grown beyond the town of Cochine? (shenoy...76)” . And the very next day she comes to know that Abhishek has committed suicide.

Ankita is shell shocked on hearing the news of suicide and is extremely perturbed because she considers herself responsible for his death. It is an unbelievable thing for her and her mind is unable to accept this. This is the event that teaches her a lesson for the life time. She realizes that sometimes knowingly or unknowingly a person makes such a mistake that he does not even know the result. She regrets the loss and curses herself inside and wishes that she would have accepted his proposal and stayed with Abhishek but all these things are of no benefit now because now everything is out of her control and she cannot correct if she wishes to any. With a heavy heart she moves to Bombay with her family and starts a new journey. There she pursues MBA and as it is evident from the beginning of the novel she is an intelligent girl, she is topper in the college there. She keeps herself busy all the day and enjoys her friends’ company. On the other hand, management course proves to be very interesting for her and she gives her full attention to her study and enjoys as well. Ankita is changing day by day and is very concerned about her study. She just lost herself in study. It is very good for her as she seems to be normal and does not over reacts as earlier she used to do even on every simple thing. Being an intelligent and responsible student she always helps her classmates. Even she prepares interesting and valuable notes and distributes among the classmates. She does not leave any stone unturned to prove her intelligence. She is always excited in making

notes and colouring them and most of the time she carries her notes from college to home and home to college vice-versa. She keeps herself so busy in her study that most of the time she does not realize how fast the whole night passed. She works day and night. She does not take rest. Everyone praises her for her hard work and also are surprised how she does these things so fast. And she continues these things as usual. Now, the fact, if we closely observe her activities and her mental condition, we can come to the conclusion that she has the symptoms of bipolar disorder like unwanted thoughts, hopelessness and irritability. One day some unknown people destroys her painting. At this she becomes very violent and gets uncontrolled. She starts crying and after a long time on that day she misses Abhishek and thinks that it was only Abhishek who can understand her mental condition and the real message of her painting. And suddenly she gets drowned in her thoughts, she seems to be very regretful. She is now badly missing the last meeting with Abhishek. She yearns to talk with him and wants to hear her voice. On that day she feels some physical pain and realizes that somebody digging inside her heart. Now a strange feeling starts haunting her mind and she feels afraid of something. This is the panic attack that she feels intense fear. She keeps herself isolated and does not wish to come out of the room. She does not want to go to college. She starts avoiding everything. Her parents are very concerned about her and they suggest her to attend college and mingle with friends so that she could change her mood. But she is not least interested in these things now. This affects her career. She is going through a very difficult time in her life. She is lost somewhere. Her destination seems to be vanished somewhere. Now, she is just a mentally and physically sick person. It looks like that somebody has switched off her mind. She is unable to understand anything; even she can't understand her own notes. Everything seems to be removed from her mind. She has started avoiding the all her friends and outsiders. She does not want to talk to anybody because she is afraid of facing people. Now her beauty, sense of humor and charm has vanished. She confines herself in four walls of a room and avoids everything around her. Now she sees only hopelessness and darkness in her life. The most painful thing is that she has tried to commit suicide twice. Now her parents realize that her daughter is suffering from some mental illness and that is why they consult a psychiatrist. When Ankita meets her, she does not feel good because she has fake manner and just professional smile according to Ankita. Only for the comfort of her parents she is ready to take medicines prescribed by her but she needs love and support rather than medication. After few days still there is no change in her mental situation rather it is getting worse day by day. Keeping in mind Ankita's mental condition, her parents decide to go to the new psychiatrists, and meets Dr. Madhusudan. He treats her with special care and love. He examines her mental conditions and suggests her parents to keep her under his observation in the asylum. But it is unbearable for Ankita as she always wants to stay with her parents so she protests and refuses to admit. Her parents consoles her that they are doing this for her sake because they love her very much but Ankita gets angry with her parents and said "*I hate you. Both of you. Come back here-don't leave me like this, you are my parents damn it.*" (shenoy...159). In the asylum, she protests for everything but after sometimes she behaves normal with nurses and doctors. She goes under electric shock and many more things but she is ready to face anything to defeat her fear.

The life in the asylum for Ankita is full of loneliness, isolation and she feels depressed. Here loneliness let her not come back out of the fear. For this she needs love and care. She is losing her hope for a new life and her spirit is getting vanished by and by. But time has something different in her box to unfold in the life of Ankita as the clouds of her sufferings must be remained for a few days after the appearance of an angel in the form of Dr. Madhusudan. He can understand her mental situation better than other psychiatrists. He has an emotional attachment to Ankita because she reminds him of his sister who was also a mental patient and owing to that she committed suicide. Her suicide stirred Madhusudan inside out. He decided to study psychiatry. So he always tried his best to keep Ankita motivated and to do so tells her various motivational stories. He goes to her home to find out about her past life. What was her life style and what and how happened it to her that pushed her in this mental condition. He finds some way to bring Ankita back to normal mental condition and so he asks her to do work of her choice. During her treatment Ankita holds a paint brush once again and fills her life with colors once again. It gives her hope, happiness and positivity. Now is back to normal. She can feel everything around her that has vanished in her past. The days she spent in the asylum was predestined and she accepts it but she fights against her fate and she is successful in bringing her back to light from the dark well of depression. Now, Anuj and Sagar are his two new friends and both comes to visit her at regular interval. She is mentally fit now. She accepts everything whatever her destiny serves her, but she never loses the hope of life. She observes many things and takes them in a positive manner and idea of suicide has vanished now. Dr. Madhusudan suggests her to take bipolar disorder as her strengths and assures her that creativity is other symptoms of bipolar disorder. She should use her creative mind to become an artist and writer. He thinks that she is different from everyone and special girl and she should use her talent. He examines her letter that she writes to Suvi and finds her another talent of writing. After a few years her life changes completely and she is awarded many academic degrees. She is also pursuing her talent for painting and writing. After that she falls in love with a kind person and got married.

Her strong will power and determination help her to triumph over her mental challenges and now her fear is vanished. She is improving day by day and one day she goes out from the asylum with new life and new journey. This story inspires us and gives a message that nothing can stop you to achieve your goal of life if you have firm determination and strong will

power to do something. Destiny plays a role but cannot stop you. It can bring you difficulties but cannot take away your will to live and survive. It's you who lose hope and are crushed under its feet and some part in destroying your life is also played by the illiterate persons of the society who even in twenty first century take mental illness as a stigma. This is more prevalent in Indian society. Now it's time to educate them about these type of mental challenges. It's our responsibility to tell people if a person suffers from Bipolar disorder so it does not mean that the person is crazy. There are so many treatments available but medication alone cannot do the magic. They also need love, care and family support to overcome their mental challenges.

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