

A Psychological reading of Self Discovery and Resilience in Preeti Shenoy's works *Life Is What You Make It*, *Wake Up*, *Life Is Calling* and *The Secret Wish List*

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Abstract

Preeti Shenoy is one of India's popular women writers in the recent era. Her narratives give a blend of psychological realism, emotional insight and themes of self identity. Her female protagonists are simple, yet powerful enough to revolve around humble individuals who confront the harsh adversities of life with remarkable demeanour, resilience and courage. This paper makes an attempt to psychologically examine Preeti Shenoy's works *Life Is What You Make It*, *Wake Up*, *Life Is Calling* and *The Secret Wish List*. The paper explores how Shenoy depicts emotional vortex, mental well being, self identity and the quest for self discovery in a changing psycho social setting. The study emphasises on the author's narrative techniques and her aptness to present the modern Indian middle class women who are on the look out for identity, true meaning and emotional stability in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Preeti Shenoy, Psychological Realism, Mental Well Being, Resilience

Introduction

After 1990's, India not only saw an economic change but saw the phase of redefinition of individual identity, aspirations and a strong bond of interpersonal relationships. Most of Shenoy's novels portray the transformation of emotions in metropolis spaces like complexities of Love, Career choices and Mental Well Being issues that intersect with modern day readers. Though Shenoy's protagonists deal with anxieties and deep sense of suppressed desires, her female characters are not mere agents of victimisation, but they are indeed the metaphors for resilience and women empowerment. In one of her fictions, *Life is What You Make It*, Shenoy focuses on mental illness and self-discovery through the protagonist Ankita Sharma's journey which is full of commotion. The sequel, *Wake Up*, *Life is Calling*, in contradiction deals with Ankita's story

of self realisation and healing, exploring her resilience and determination to embrace life after trauma. In *The Secret Wish List*, Shenoy focuses on the silent frustrations and sabotaged desires of women choked on dominant patriarchal expectations. These novels form a trilogy of hope, courage, and the rediscovery of one's true self.

Psychological and Emotional Realm

In *Life Is What You Make It*, Shenoy uses the protagonist Ankita as a medium to depict psychological realism. Ankita slips into bipolar disorder which is depicted with acute sensitivity and genuinity. Ankitha's raw emotions are depicted with authenticity and perfection. Her unchannelised emotional outbursts, the feeling of unexplainable loss on her own self ends her up with bipolar disorder. Every time she tries to unshackle, her intense confusion leads to psychological fluctuation. Though the sense of self consciousness and guilt of betrayal pricks her momentarily, Ankita finds love and commits to Abhishek in her later days while she still feels for Vaibhav who is her first love in school days. She ends up emotionally confused every time when she tries to find an escape route to make peace with her inner turmoil.

To make matters worse, Ankitha also experiences immense pressure from her parents as well. The author has vividly picturised the typical Indian family expectations of career, love, education and simply to be yes master for her parents demands. On the contrary, what Ankita experiences is about her fear of 'failure' and 'perfectionism'. Her mental well being is not uprooted once and for all, but is depicted with subtle everyday behaviours with emotional backwardness, numb attitude of parents and lack of motivation. Ankita is not just portrayed as a mere female protagonist. She is the unheard voice of million middle class women. She holds the mirror to contemporary women for introspection and psychological well being. The readers gain access to the character's fears, her remorse and juggling days for normal life. Her external conflicts lead her to introspect herself and she realises that she is discontent with things falling apart.

In *Wake Up, Life Is Calling* which is the sequel of *Life is What You Make It*, Ankita survives two suicide attempts which reveals her traumatised life. Healing becomes a major concern to her as she silently fights her past. When things seem impossible to Ankita, her school love Vaibav enters her life. She struggles to share her past with him as it seems like a delicate glass that is about to shatter. But when she opens up, Vaibhav breaks her delicate heart. Throughout the novel Ankita fails to appreciate her life and to feel content. Her passion of pursuing MBA fails and she finds redemption in poetry writing. This temporarily helps her to truly accept who she is. Her internal battle is evident as she resists taking prescribed medication and she violently reacts against her father in frustration. The frustration is further shown in one of the cultural festivals Euphoria where she experiences a mix of hope and anxiety. Her friend Joseph's appearance causes her deep anxiety and leads to vomiting on stage. When her friends Freddy and Parul take the side of gossip mongers against her, it amplifies her feelings for isolation. She reaches a stage

where she loses all the hopes of the people around and turns toward writing Life's Little Notes to reciprocate to her inner self and fulfill her needs. She ends up finding a suicide manual and using it too. Only with the help of Professor Mrs Hayden she practices visualisation and affirmation to combat her negative thoughts.

In the novel *The Secret Wishlist*, protagonist Diksha is a young woman who is dissatisfied with her routine daily life as a wife, mother and an employee. Diksha becomes a metaphor for simplicity. Her life is surrounded with two sets of people who are contradicting each other. On the one hand her friend Tanu, her cousin Vibha, her school love Ankit, her salsa instructor Gaurav who all stood by Diskha during her ups and downs. Even Diksha's mother in law forms a beautiful bond with her as she looks very closely at her daughter in law's sacrifices for the sake of family. Her mother in law ends up taking the side of Diksha and accepts the decision to divorce Sandeep, to give her the deserving chance to move away from Sandeep to pursue her own dreams. On the other hand, her husband Sandeep who is insensitive, stubborn, adamant and always kept his wife at bay with no absolute feelings for his wife who is later joined by Diksha's brother Rohan and her parents. The novel reflects the psychological theme of self actualization and women's identity.

Being a mother and a wife in a humble dwelling, Diksha always wanted to explore her inner thoughts and emotions. The novel has used various characters to depict a middle attitude and portrays a male imposed barriers on women. Sandeep becomes increasingly agitated against her wife and his son Abhay as he always finds himself surrounded with work. He fails to cater to the needs of his son Abhay who lacks the presence and empathy of his father. Diksha does her best to fulfill the needs of her family as a typical Indian woman which goes unnoticed and unappreciated. This triggers her to question her existence in the family and society. Frequent meetings with her cousin Vibha and her friend Tanu, persuades Diksha to fulfill her secret wishlist. In an isolated and lost life, she finds herself in salsa classes which sparks her passion of learning and even having an idea to own her dance classes in her later phase of life. As she battles her lonely life Ankit who is her school love enters her life and assures her of a better life with him and plans a trip to Maldives. Her arrival back to Bangalore causes chaos in her life as Sandeep had found her secret meetings with Guarav who is her salsa instructor and her meeting with Ankit which brands her of adultery from her own neighbourhood. Tanu, Vibha and Diksha's mother in law become the trump cards in Diksh's life as they stand by her to break the shackles and they convince Disksha to pursue her heart and soul. The novel shatters the silence around psychological suffering in the Indian middle class and shows how self acceptance can become the stepping stone of recovery.

Women's Liberation and Self-Actualization

Both the novels *Life is What You Make It* and *Wake Up, Life is Calling* focuses on mental well-being and personal hardships, but *The Secret Wish List* inflates Shenoy's concern to intricate relationships and societal norms. The protagonist, Diksha, is a selfless character who voices out for the countless Indian women who sacrifice their ambitions for familial duties. Her journey as a teenager and a wife to an independent woman in her later phase of life encapsulates the central feminist theme of self-actualization and liberation.

Shenoy depiction of women not as victims but as representatives of change. The novels thrive to be a runway to all the protagonists in delivering the importance of pursuing their dreams, and passions, determined individuality, and reexamine happiness. Through Ankita and Diksha's story, Shenoy critiques and questions dominant patriarchal norms and extends a vision of women empowerment grounded in emotional strength and much needed self-respect. In *Wake Up, Life is Calling*, the protagonist's life after rehabilitation becomes a metaphor for human resilience. Shenoy portrays how trauma can become a game changer experience, leading to new beginnings. Through Ankita's reflections, the author highlights the importance of forgiveness, self-acceptance, and mindfulness in personal healing.

Narrative Style and Thematic Unity

Shenoy's language is simple yet reminiscent, promoting a wide readership while her writings retain emotional depth. Her simple way of first-person narratives allow readers to experience the character's internal struggles intimately. A notable feature of her storytelling is its therapeutic tone and each novel encourages introspection, hope, and healing.

Across the three novels, Shenoy maintains thematic unity: the conflict between societal expectations and personal freedom, the confrontation of psychological challenges, and the ultimate triumph of the human spirit. Her narratives, though contemporary in setting, resonate with universal emotions - love, loss, guilt, and the desire for self-fulfillment.

Conclusion

Preeti Shenoy's fiction constructively embodies the voice of contemporary India- one that values emotional intelligence, mental well-being, and gender equality. Through *Life is What You Make It*, *Wake Up, Life is Calling*, and *The Secret Wish List*, she transforms everyday's monotonous experiences into profound reflections on life and identity. Her protagonists, especially women, emerge as symbols of self acceptance and self-discovery, making her works not only popular but also socially relevant to contemporary society. Shenoy's contribution lies in her ability to bridge literature and life, offering her readers both empathy and inspiration.

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