



PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND MENTAL HEALTH: A CRITICAL STUDY OF PREETY SHENOY'S 'LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT'

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Abstract:

This study is aimed at examining the main themes present in novel, with a particular focus on how main character's interactions impact her emotional well-being and vice versa. Preeti Shenoy's work, *Life is What You Make It*, serves an interesting exploration of the connection between relationships and mental wellness. By closely analyzing the main character's journey, this research sheds light on the significant influence that personal connections have on an individual's mental health journey. The major issues covered include family ties, romantic entanglements, societal expectations, and the protagonist's battle with mental health challenges. Furthermore, the analysis explore into Shenoy's depiction of the main character's strength, coping mechanisms, and ultimate journey towards self-discovery and self-acceptance. Through a psychological and interpersonal lens, this study adds to a deeper comprehension of the complex relationship between personal connections and mental well-being as depicted in Preeti Shenoy's *Life is What You Make It*

Key Words- Love, Relationship, Mental Health, Family Bounding

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DOI: 10.53555/ecb/2022.11.9.86

Introduction:

Life is What You Make It by Preeti Shenoy is a novel that follows the life of its protagonist, Ankita Sharma. The primary plot focus is Ankita's journey through various challenges, setbacks, and triumphs as she makes her way through life and relationships. The story begins by introducing Ankita Sharma, a bright and ambitious young woman who is pursuing her studies at privileged college. The portrayal of Ankita is that of an intelligent, confident, and determined student, who excels academically and establishes herself as a promising student. When at the first time went to college she said that "The first feeling I had when I entered the college gates was that of breathlessness. I had hurried to make it in time for the first day at college. I could not believe that my school days were actually over and I was officially a college student". (Shenoy, 3) She forms close friendships and experiences the joy of young adulthood. In *Life is What You Make It* by Preeti Shenoy, Ankita Sharma is introduced as a bright and ambitious young woman. She is depicted as a determined individual who is passionate about her studies and future goals. From the outset, Ankita's character displays intelligence, confidence, and a strong sense of independence.

Ankita's introduction establishes her as a standout student at her college, where she excels academically and earns the respect of her peers and professors. She is portrayed as someone with a clear vision for her future and a persistent drive to achieve her dreams. Additionally, Ankita is shown to have a vibrant personality and a talent for forming meaningful connections with those around her. Sharan opined about the Shenoy characters "They do not hesitate or suppress their feelings instead they stand for their rights in the society. They play an important role in the family and society by making them equal to their male counterparts both mentally and financially". (Sharan, 2199) She cultivates close friendships and cherishes the bonds she shares with her loved ones. Overall, Ankita's introduction sets the stage for the challenges and success she will encounter throughout the novel. It provides with insight into her character, motivations, and aspirations, laying the foundation for the compelling narrative that follows.

In *'Life is What You Make It,'* Preeti Shenoy portrays the protagonist Ankita Sharma's mental health struggles with compassion and insight. Through Ankita's experiences, the novel sheds light on the challenges of living with depression and anxiety, highlighting the importance of destigmatization, awareness, and support. Here's

an exploration of Ankita's mental health struggles. From the early stages of the novel, Ankita struggles with overwhelming feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and anxiety. Shenoy colorfully depicts the internal disorder Ankita experiences, portraying her as someone who is constantly battling her own mind. Ankita's mental health struggles lead to social withdrawal and isolation. She finds it increasingly difficult to engage with others and participate in activities she once enjoyed. This withdrawal makes worse her feelings of loneliness and worsens her depressive symptoms.

Ankita's mental health issues are obvious in persistent feelings of self-doubt and worthlessness. She struggles with a distorted self-image and constantly questions her value and capabilities. "There is so much troubling me. I struggle every day to control my thoughts. I am fighting a daily battle with my mind" (Shenoy, 128). These negative thought patterns contribute to a cycle of self-sabotage and emotional distress. "Physical illness receives more attention than mental illness does. In terms of general health, well-being, and quality of life, mental health is increasingly acknowledged as crucial. (Devika, 4433) Suicidal thoughts come to Ankita during her lowest point, when she contemplates ending her own life to escape her pain and suffering. Shenoy confronts this sensitive subject matter with understanding and concern, highlighting the urgency of providing support and intervention for individuals in crisis. Throughout the novel, Ankita struggles with the stigma surrounding mental illness, which compounds her suffering and inhibits her from seeking help. Shenoy explores the societal misconceptions and prejudices that contribute to this stigma, emphasizing the importance of fostering understanding and acceptance.

Despite the barriers she faces, Ankita eventually seeks help for her mental health issues. She undergoes treatment and receives support from her loved ones, highlighting the importance of professional treatment and social support in the recovery process. Through therapy, self-reflection, and the support of others, Ankita boards on a journey of resilience and recovery. She learns to manage her symptoms, cultivate self-care practices, and prioritize her own well-being. Shenoy portrays Ankita's journey with sensitivity and authenticity, emphasizing the hope and possibility of recovery for individuals living with mental illness. Overall, *Life is What You Make It* offers an emotional portrayal of Ankita's mental health struggles, highlighting the complications of

living with depression and anxiety. Through Ankita's story, Shenoy advocates for greater awareness, empathy, and support for those affected by mental illness.

The novel *Life is What You Make It* offers a nuanced portrayal of the interplay between personal relationships and mental health. The novel explore deep into the complexities of how our interactions with others can deeply impact our psychological well-being, and vice versa. Here's a closer look at how Shenoy explores this interplay.

The protagonist, Ankita Sharma, struggles with the high expectations and pressure from her family, particularly her mother. This strained relationship contributes significantly to Ankita's mental health struggles, as she feels suffocated by the weight of family obligations and community expectations. Throughout the novel, Ankita navigates various romantic relationships, each influencing her mental state in different ways. From the initial excitement of young love to the heartbreak of betrayal and rejection, Shenoy portrays how romantic entanglements can profoundly impact one's emotional well-being. Ankita finds comfort and support in her friendships, particularly with her close friend Vaibhav. These relationships serve as a source of comfort and stability during her darkest moments, highlighting the therapeutic power of genuine connections and emotional support.

Shenoy delicately addresses the stigma surrounding mental health issues, depicting Ankita's internal struggle with shame and isolation. Through Ankita's experiences, we witness the damaging effects of societal misconceptions and the importance of nurturing open dialogue and understanding. "The pain I was now feeling was almost physical. It felt like there was somebody inside my heart digging out little bits of it with a scalped and throwing it away, a sense of emptiness quickly filling up the dugout bits." (Shenoy, 103) As Ankita struggles with depression and anxiety, she learns to lean on coping mechanisms such as therapy, self-care practices, and the support of loved ones. Shenoy emphasizes the significance of nurturing healthy support systems and seeking professional help when needed in overcoming mental health challenges. Despite the adversities Ankita faces, including a suicide attempt, she undergoes significant personal growth and resilience. Through introspection and self-discovery, she learns to prioritize her own well-being and pursue her passions, ultimately reclaiming control over her life.

Overall, novel offers a comprehensive exploration of how personal relationships can shape and be shaped by an individual's mental health. Shenoy's narrative underscores the complexities of human connection and the deep impact it can have on our emotion. The themes of personal relationships and mental health are intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative, providing readers with a poignant and insightful exploration of these complex topics. "The reader feels carried away along with the story's momentum, feeling the hurt and hiatus which Ankita experiences in her troublesome journey," (Darkhasha,227) Through Ankita Sharma her experiences, Shenoy offers a critical study of how personal relationships can impact one's mental health and vice versa. Here's an analysis explores into various types of relationships, including familial, romantic, and platonic, and examines how they can deeply influence an individual's mental well-being. For Ankita, her relationships with her family, friends, and romantic partners play a significant role in shaping her mental health.

The tense relationship with her mother, who imposes high expectations on Ankita, contributes to her feelings of inadequacy and pressure; worsen her struggles with anxiety and depression. Conversely, Ankita finds solace and support in her friendships, particularly with her close friend Vaibhav, whose unwavering encouragement and understanding serve as a source of comfort during her darkest moments. Through Ankita's journey, Shenoy sheds light on the stigma surrounding mental health issues in society. Ankita struggles with feelings of shame and isolation due to societal misconceptions about mental illness, which obstructs her ability to seek help and openly discuss her struggles.

Furthermore, Shenoy highlights the importance of reducing the stigma surrounding mental health by engaging in sympathetic and well-informed conversations, promoting increased awareness and acceptance within communities. Ankita's challenges with mental well-being significantly influence how she views herself and her sense of self. She wrestles with feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty, doubting her abilities and worth as an individual. Shenoy explore into the inner turmoil those individuals facing mental health issues encounter, emphasizing the gap between one's authentic self and the distorted perceptions shaped by mental health challenges. Despite the obstacles Ankita confronts, Shenoy underscores the human spirit's resilience and the potential for personal growth and recovery. Through therapy, introspection, and the support of loved ones,

Ankita begins a voyage of self-discovery and gradual healing. Her ability to endure hardship stands as proof of the transformative impact of self-care, self-acceptance, and seeking assistance for emotional and mental wellness.

Conclusion

Life is What You Make It, skillfully mix together the themes of personal connections and mental well-being. The story follows Ankita Sharma and explore into how her relationships with family, friends, and partners shape her mental health. It explores the impact of these connections on her emotional journey, from the weight of family expectations to the comfort of genuine friendships. The novel sensitively addresses Ankita's battles with depression and anxiety, shedding light on the struggles faced by those living with mental illness. Through Ankita's path towards self-discovery and resilience, the book emphasizes the need for awareness, destigmatization, and compassionate support for individuals dealing with mental health issues. Ultimately, it highlights the deep influence of personal connections on emotional well-being and self-perception. *Life is What You Make It* offers an emotional reminder of the transformative power of love, understanding, and self-acceptance in overcoming life's obstacles and nurturing personal growth.

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