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Portrayal of Women as Emerging Self in Preeti Shinoy's Novel *Life is What You Make It..*

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Abstract:

Preeti Shenoy represents marginalized world of women and depicts how women go through or face such questions ‘What would you do if destiny twisted the road you took?’, and ‘what if it threw you to a place, you did not want to go?’, and ‘would you fight, would you run or would you accept?’. Set across two cities in India in the early eighties, *Life is What You Make It* is a gripping account of a few significant years of Ankita’s life. Ankita Sharma has the world at her feet. She is young, good looking, smart, and has tones of friends and boys swooning over her. She also manages to get into a premier management school for her MBA. Six months later, she is a patient in a mental hospital.

Life has cruelly and coldly snatched that which meant the most to her and she must now fight to get it all back. It is a deeply moving and inspiring account of growing up, of the power of faith and how determination and an indomitable spirit can overcome even what destiny throws at you. A tale, at its core a love story that makes us question our beliefs about ourselves and our concepts of sanity, and forces us to believe that life is what one makes.

Keywords: Bipolar disorder, mental health, sanity, boldness, patriarchal social set up, determination, willpower.

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Preeti Shenoy is an author and artist living in Bangalore. Her first book *34Bubblegums and Candies*, is a creative non-fiction, made it to the national best seller list. Her interests are as multifarious and diverse as her several academic degrees. She also specializes in pencil portraits and hold an internationally recognized qualification from UK in portraiture. She has held a number of varied jobs in the past. She has also written for different publications like *Reader's Digest* and *The Times of India*, as well as taught English and Math to underprivileged children. She loves art, reading, travelling, photography, nature, animals, blogging, basketball, and most of all, spending time with family.

Life is What You Make It is second book by Shenoy published in 2011. After it she published *Tea for Two and A Piece of Cake*, *The Secret Wish List*, *The One You Can not Have*, *It Happens for A Reason*, *Love Kisses and All Things Warm*, *Why We Love The Way We Do*, *Its All in the Planet's*, *A Hundred Little Flames*, *Love a Little Stronger*, *The Rule Breakers*, *Wake Up*, *Life is Calling*, and *The Magic Mindset: How to Find Your Happy Place*.

Life is What You Make It (2011) is a novel which shows gripping account of a few significant years of Ankita's life. It also addresses the questions 'what would you do if destiny twisted the road you took?', 'what if it threw to a place, you did not want to go?', 'would you fight, would you run or would you accept?'. Shenoy has answered all these questions portraying the character of Ankita. She represents her as a new woman. It is similar to what Dorothy Parker has written, "I cannot be just to books which treat of woman as woman. My idea is that all of us, men as well as women; should be regarded as human beings" (The Second Sex, xiv). Similarly, Shenoy portrays her protagonist as human being. The protagonist Ankita Sharma has the world at her feet. She is young, good looking, smart, and has tones of friends. When the novel starts, Ankita is in a mental hospital. How did Ankita get here? What were the events that led to this? Will she ever get back her life? Life has cruelly and coldly snatched which meant most to her and she fights to get it back. It is a deeply moving and inspiring account of growing up, of the power of faith and how determination and an indomitable spirit can overcome even what destiny throws at her. It is a tale, at its core a love story that makes one question beliefs about self and one's concept of sanity, and forces one to believe that life is truly what one makes it. Ankita is a woman who does act in a way what Swami Vivekanand suggests about:

Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world. Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong, if any of you dares to say, "I will work out the salvation of this woman"....Hands off! They will solve their problems" (76).

Ankita has been the school head girl. She is from a typical lower middle- class family. She has been hesitant, but during college elections her friends motivate her for fight for Arts Scry. She fights and also wins. She becomes more confident. She herself confesses once, 'when my initial embarrassment was gone, it was replaced by a sense of competitive spirit (18)'. This shows that being a girl reared in lower middle class typical family she is submissive but, at the depth she has immense confidence to reach heights. During elections, she feels hesitant for sometime, later she overcomes it and becomes bold. These lines show her feelings beautifully:

It was the first time in my life that I was facing a crowd of at least 3000 people. Standing on the stage there, addressing them, with the spot light on me, it all felt very surreal. I was a little nervous and my palms were slightly cold but I managed to deliver my short, rehearsed speech without any glitters. (20)

And about freedom she experiences first time:

I was beginning to discover that there was indeed something liberating about an all- woman atmosphere. Here you could be yourself totally. There were no men would ogle at you, and nobody really raised an eyebrow. It was capsulated, insulated world and I was slowly beginning to understand it. (21)

Ankita has been in relationship for two times. In Delhi, she is in love with Vaibhav. And at Cochin, she has been in love relationship with Abhishek. But she never gets dominated by any of two. When her friend Abhishek stops her leaving Cochin to join M.B.A at Bombay college, but she is determined. She is practical girl. It is clear when she says:

He was such an emotional fool. This was an opportunity of a lifetime for me. How could I just think it up, for something which I presumed was love? How

foolish was that? I was not getting swayed. Abhi felt I was being hard hearted. I felt I was being practical and emotional. (68)

Furthermore, her intentions are clear when she thinks:

Later I thought about what Abhi said. I concluded he was frustrated and jealous as he had not made it. How could he ask me to give up something I had worked so hard for just so I could be with him. CUSAT did not look appealing at all. In the dazzle and glamour of Bombay, what chances did it have. I did not feel any regret about leaving my friends behind. (69)

When Abhishek commits suicide, she becomes insane. Mental illness is still a taboo in India. She suffers a lot. But eventually, being a strong headed woman, she recovers from it and becomes an independent woman. She leaves M.B.A., and opt career in creative writing.

To conclude, it is said that Preeti Shenoy's *Life is What You Make It* is a story of human mind and the immense power of positive thinking. The gripping narrative conveys with gentle wisdom how by changing our thoughts we can change our life itself. Ankita has fought a mental disorder, been through hell, and survived bad period of depression. Being a girl from lower middle class, she learns a lot, becomes confident. She does good in college. Due to some incidents collectively, she suffers depression, but eventually she overcomes it and studies her dream subject that is creative writing.

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