

Gender Disparity: A Reading of Preeti Shenoy's *Life Is What You Make It*

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Abstract

Preeti Shenoy, an Indian novelist was born in 1971 in Kolkata. Her distinguished writings are *Life Is What You Make It*, *The Secret Wishlist*, *The One You Cannot Have*, *It Happens for a Reason* and *The Rule Breakers*. *Life Is What You Make It* was published in 2011. Through this novel, Shenoy focuses on themes like women oppression and exploitation. The novel focuses on the innocent love story of the protagonist named Ankita and its disastrous consequences. Shenoy addresses about a prevailing social issue for the first time through the portrayal of pseudo characters.

The novel presents about the plight Ankita Sharma, who was forced to bring back her lost control. She becomes the reason for the death of her boyfriend as she had rejected his love proposal. When the letter that was written by her boyfriend with blood comes to the knowledge of her parents, especially her father she is punished severely that leads her towards depression and alters into bipolar disorder. Preeti Shenoy does not represent her as an individual character, but as a representative of all the women characters who are forced to battle against suppression by the male-chauvinistic society. Shenoy has taken up the tag of being one among the post-colonial women fiction writers who presents about the sufferings of the liberated women even in the modern, globalized twenty-first century.

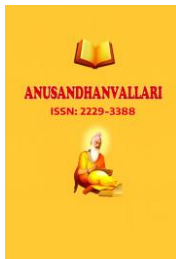
Keywords : parental domination, mental depression, anger, courage and determination.

Full Paper

'Familial bond' is a word that describes about events, relationships and all the incidents related to the family. 'Family' is defined as a domestic group of people having a certain degree of kinship either through blood, marriage or adoption. In families, each and every child is provided due respect along with their food and they are instructed to grow up by taking proper care of the others, thereby developing a healthy and strong relationship. But, the members of the family face various problems that leads to physical and psychological issues.

Depression is one such common and serious illness that occurs in the psychology of the affected individual. Various combinations of biological, environmental, psychological and genetic factors leads an individual to experience depression. It is the disorder of the brain which drains the energy and hope. It also alters the parts of the brain that are involved with mood, thinking and appetite. During this period of depression, the affected individuals may cry and they will develop a negative outlook towards life. During this period, the suffering individuals undergo sadness, loss of energy, feelings of hopelessness or worthlessness, not enjoying things that they had liked once, trouble in concentration, uncontrollable crying, trouble in decision making, irritability, needing more sleep, thoughts of death and attempting suicide. Recovering from depression requires hard and constant actions.

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Preeti Shenoy was born on 21 Dec. 1971 in Karnataka, India. She is one among the top-selling authors and has twelve novels to her credit. Some of her writings are *Life Is What You Make It*, *The Secret Wishlist*, *The One You Cannot Have*, *It happens for a Reason* and *The Rule Breakers*. The selected novel *Life Is What You Make It* was selected as the 'Top Books of 2011' by Hindustan Times and became the national bestseller. Her works have been translated into many languages. She has been awarded the 'Indian of the Year Award' for 2017 by Brands Academy for her contribution to literature and the 'Academia Award for Business Excellence' by the New Delhi Institute of Management.

Life Is What You Make It was in the top books list of 2011 as per the Nielsen list which is published by Hindustan Times. It is an astonishing love story set in India in the 1990's. It is a novel that talks of the themes of love, hope and determination thereby providing with numerous ideas about how individuals can overcome their own destiny. It also focuses on the impact of relationship, depression and destiny in the life of the protagonist named Ankita as she was psychologically affected due to her broken love affair and the harsh, inhuman activities of her parents.

The novel brings out the pitiable plight of Ankita, a college student in her mid 20's. Issues of the past that are associated with true love, bloodshed and death haunts her. During her schoolings, she gets into a relationship with two boys named Abhi and Vaibhav. In this moment, she does not receive proper parental guidance or the timely advice from the elders. The result is that her thoughts get divided and confused but she turns to be competitive in nature. She gets admission in a prestigious college where she falls in love with another guy. In the meantime, her parents find out the love letters written by Abhi that are written with blood. Her father gets very angry that he punishes her severely for the first time and burns off the letters in front of her with a warning related to future affairs.

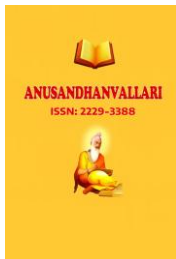
When he burns the letter, Ankita senses burning sensations both physically and psychologically. Later, she stops conversing altogether and attempts suicide several times and is saved miraculously. The result is that she is diagnosed with bipolar disorder and is hospitalized several times. The love and affection showered by one of the doctors, alters the psychological nature of Ankita. She tries to gather herself and handles all the situations with sheer determination. Finally, she overcomes all the challenges that comes in her path towards success and creates a life that she desired in a successful manner.

In the aspect of familial relationship, Ankita's parents play a major role. At the start, they were not willing to send her abroad for higher studies. She was not allowed to answer phone calls. Whenever her boyfriend Vaibhav decides to speak to her through the telephone, it was Ankita's mother who picked it up all the times. When she secretly sneaks into her father's bedroom when they are away for a walk, she felt frightened feeling that if she was caught red-handed, they might ruin her life. Vaibhav too understands the relationship maintained by Ankita with her parents'. The result is that when her parents' pick up the telephone beyond his expectations, he hangs the call immediately.

Even after leaving college, Ankita continues her relationship with Vaibhav despite her parent's opposition. They did not force her to ignore him to a greater extent as she excelled in her education beyond their expectations. They relocated to Bombay due to her father's promotion in his job, and she gets a new team of friends where she meets a boy named Abhi and falls head over heels in love with him. Due to Abhi's compulsion, she continues her MBA in CUSAT and works hard, thereby making her parents' happy. Her curiosity about her ways towards her prosperity is described by Ankita as:

Whatever it was, it seemed to be propelling her forward and pushing me to work harder and harder. After I got back from my jog, I would rush to college. My parents were happy to see me working so much. If they knew what was to come later they would have probably stopped me. But they did not and they felt very proud of their 'star-child'. (87)

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Ankita returns back home after jogging and tells her parents that she was able to go for a long distance. But her mother discourages her saying that she had become so thin unlike her brother who was encouraged to execute his heart's desire and he was showered with positive comments. The mother comments her saying, "You look like someone who escaped from the concentration camp" (88). Terry Eagleton in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* points out the opinion of Freud by stating that, "There is always a return of the repressed. Slips of the tongue or open, the forgetting of names and similar accidents show this example is from my own experience and it attributes significance to the forgetting of a word from a quotation" (135). Hearing this, Ankita turns irritated but she controls herself. The reason is because she clearly learn that, as parents, they are unable to understand about her passion, love or emotions in a proper manner. On the next day, her parents clean her room to find out about her hidden and dead past, but they are unaware of the facts and they create confusion in the life of Ankita that creates disastrous consequences and alters the smooth fabric present in Ankita's life. Her parent's had found out the letter written to her by Abhi in blood.

Ankita's parents speak hurtful and insulting words to her face for the first time in her life and she had no one to talk in favour of her. They pay no heed to the incidents that her father angrily questions her asking, "And have you written back to him, you shameless hussy?" (116). He calls her as "a mad bastard" (116) to her face while her mother too angrily asks, "How many guys will you trap with your wily charms, you stupid little tramp?" (117). while the parents question her with deeply wounding words, Ankita felt that it was the boys who were actually behind her, compelling her to fall in love with them. The harsh words of Ankita's mother instilled a very bad impact in her emotional wellbeing that she says:

Unwittingly my mother had struck at the very core of my self esteem and shattered it to pieces. I could not even pick up the bits. Almost immediately I was filled with a deep sense of shame, regret, guilt and hollowness. I felt sick. "There is only one thing to do now", said my dad. "I want you to promise me that you will stop all this letter writing nonsense". (118)

Due to her parent's uncultured behaviour, Ankita develops mixed feelings. She has altering feelings of shame, regret, guilt and hollowness at varying degrees but her conscience instructs her that she was suffering only due to the gender disparity that is followed by the society in general and Ankita's parents in particular. In Bertrand Russell's work, *Russell's Best* Robert E. Egner says that there are two categories of people where the first group of people take decisions with the brain while the second group of people take decisions with the heart and here, Ankita belongs to the second category. The result is that she remains as a mute spectator despite her talent of speaking out boldly and her educational background. However, the result turns out to be disastrous. She exposes different sorts of behaviour from time to time but she was not taken care of properly. Hence, she attempts suicide by slitting her hand in the bathroom. Unfortunately, prompt medical help was rendered to her that her life was not at stake. After this incident, her parents grip upon her tightens to a greater extend that she was taken to the mental hospital. To her owe, she was hospitalized despite her severe protests. Fortunately, she was discharged from that hospital as she did not expose any sort of improvements and was later taken to a kind psychiatrist who encourages her to expose her inborn talents. This relieves her stress and she returns back to normal slowly that she was finally able to get admission for higher studies and thereby live life to the lees.

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