

FINDING HOPE IN THE BIPOLAR JOURNEY: A STUDY ON PREETI SHENOY'S LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT.

Dr. S. Ramya Niranjani,

Assistant Professor of English,

Sri Sarada College for Women (Autonomous),

Salem-16.

Mail ID- ramyadarshaa3@gmail.com

S. Magishavarthini,

Ph.D.Scholar,

Sri Sarada College for Women (Autonomous),

Salem-16.

Mail ID – magisha02@gmail.com

Abstract

The Indian author Preeti Shenoy is ranked among the top five bestselling authors in India. She is also the most distinguished celebrities in India. Her novel Life is What you make it revolves around the life of Ankita Sharma, the protagonist of the novel. The setting of the novel is India in 1990s. Shenoy depicts the ebb and flow of life through her characters. Ankita is only in her 20s, but she faces a plethora of ups and downs in her life. It is mainly due to her love relationship with three different men- Vaibhav, Abhishek and Joseph. Her mental trauma begins when Abhishek commits suicide, as she prefers doing M.B.A. to marrying Abhishek. Later, when Ankita's parents find the love letters written by Vaibhav and Abhishek, the situation becomes worse. She suffers from mental breakdown and even tries to commit suicide. Her parents get collapsed by her activities, take her to different hospitals in the hope of recovering her. At last, Dr. Madhusudan of National Mental Health Institute diagnoses that she is suffering from bipolar disorder. Through the treatment and counselling from Dr.Madhusudan, Ankita gains hope and she becomes normal.

This paper focuses on the mental trauma faced by Ankita, the reasons behind it and how she recovers from it. She regains hope in her life and develops a positive view of life. Ankita, who was much depressed and even tried to commit suicide, begins a new phase in her life. This paper also highlights the fact that suicide cannot be a solution to any problem and one should have hope in one's life. She creates new light on the connection between external circumstances and the inner sufferings. Thus, Shenoy instils hope and understanding in the hearts of the readers.

Keywords: *Hope- Bipolar Disorder- Love- Depression- Suicidal tendencies*

Life has many inevitable twists and turns which make life beautiful or difficult for people. Though psychologists suggest different vehicles such as grit, self-efficacy, optimism, inspiration, determination, etc. to reach a goal or to live life without giving up, it is hope which is the most important vehicle to approach problems and obstacles with a mindset and a strategy to achieve the set goal. In 1991, Charles R. Synder, a psychologist came up with Hope Theory. Hope links past and present to the future. Though the modern generation has been technically developing, they turn to be very sensitive and lose hope even for small issues. Hopelessness is an emotion pertaining to low mood, isolation, lack of motivation and lack of interest in future. It occurs mainly among individuals who lead dissatisfied and stressed life. The feeling of hopelessness among young-aged people is mainly due to relationship issues.

According to National Institute of Mental Health, Bipolar Disorder is associated with unusual shifts in mood, activity levels, energy, concentration and the potential to carry out day-to-day activities. The treatments for Bipolar Disorder include medication, ECT and psychotherapy.

The Indian author Preeti Shenoy is ranked among the top five bestselling authors in India. She is also the most distinguished celebrities in India. She stresses the importance of love, faith and courage in one's life and how these values play a vital role in everyday life. Her novel *Life is What you make it* centres around the life of Ankita Sharma and her love relationship with three men- Vaibhav, Abhishek and Joseph. She is only in her 20s, but she faces a plethora of ups and downs in her life.

Falling in love is an emotional hook-up that occurs at any age, but the adolescents face a great difficulty to manage the feelings. The teenagers struggle to come to grips with the seeming incongruity of their changing relationships. Ankita, the protagonist and Vaibhav are schoolmates. Vaibhav proposes Ankita and she feels "ecstatic" (13). Ankita joins St. Agnes college, where she meets Abhishek of Mahaveers college. Their relationship develops and they meet at every cultural event which makes them even closer. But Ankita always feels guilty about Vaibhav to which her friend Suvi says, "Sometimes you're such a people pleaser, no actually that should be Vaibhav-pleaser" (39). Though she feels guilty of cheating Vaibhav, she enjoys the company of Abhishek. She reveals, "My inner voice squeaked again trying to remind me to tell him about Vaibhav. But somehow at that moment, Vaibhav and everything to do about him seemed so far away. I was having such a good time that I didn't want anything to spoil it" (46).

Ankita discloses that she has a boyfriend who is in Delhi. Abhishek denies to accept it as a truth. Abhishek's love on Ankita is so deep and he wants her to be in his life forever. He expresses his love through a letter which contains the words "I LOVE YOU" written in his blood. He says, "I wanted you to see how sincere I was and how desperate. Gosh, you have no idea how much I love you" (47). After completing her course, she prefers doing MBA at Bombay. Abhishek tries to convince her to marry him, but she is determined to focus on her studies. She says "How could I tell him that my dreams had grown beyond the town of Cochin?

They had tasted life outside. They had seen a wider world out there. I wanted a slice of that. It was mine for the asking. I could not be tied down like this. I could not commit. I could not give him my word. Heck, I could not even tell him that I loved him” (76). He becomes depressed and commits suicide. When Ankita calls his grandfather, he advises her “Never belittle love” (79).

Ankita moves to Bombay to pursue her dream of MBA. She becomes hyperactive both physically and mentally. She is rigorous in her early morning jogging and meticulous in her studies. She gets affected by insomnia. This is the beginning stage of her Bipolar Disorder. At this point in her life, her classmate Joseph proposes her. Though she does not love him, she accepts his proposal remembering the voice of Abhishek’s grandfather. Ankita’s condition becomes worse when her parents find out the love letters of Vaibhav and Abhishek which she has secretly kept in her room. They scold her terribly and burn the letters in front of her. From that incident, she has started to hurt herself physically. She is haunted by the feeling of fear and could not go to the college. She loses interest in everything and prefers just to lie on bed. She also loses her ability to read and comprehend a book. She even tries to commit suicide. Her parents realise the depth of her problem at that moment and take her to different hospitals, in the hope of recovering her. At last, they take her to National Mental Health Institute at Bangalore. Ankita is advised to get admitted in the hospital. At first, she pleads her parents to take her home and suddenly starts to behave violently. She loses her self-control and so she is given sedative and she faints. Dubey comments,

She[Ankita] is diagnosed with a mental ailment medically termed as Bipolar Disorder, a state of mind which is symptomized by dramatic mood shifts which dwindle between two phases namely the manic phase where the afflicted is bursting with energy and high spirits followed by depressive phase which often culminates to suicidal tendencies. (435)

Ankita is given Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT), which helps to reduce her suicidal tendencies. Dr. Madhusudan plays a major role in inculcating hope in Ankita’s life. As Ankita mentions, “He was offering me the last vestiges of hope and I was clinging to it with the desperation of a drowning person” (164). Dr. Madhusudan truly cares for her and his faith on her gives courage to her. As a person affected with bipolar disorder, she has to regain her hope to lead a normal life and Dr. Madhusudan facilitates it. He is more attached towards her because his own sister has committed suicide. His family members could not sort out the reason for her suicide. That is when Madhusudan has decided to study psychiatry and help people who attempt suicide. He suggests her that though she has dropped out of her MBA, she can do other things. For the first time, Ankita has thought of this option and about her future. She even expresses that she feels safe to stay in the hospital.

Then Ankita is shifted to Occupational Therapy (O.T.) wing where there is a recreation room which impresses her, “O.T. wing seemed like a different world altogether. It did not have the feel of a hospital in the least bit” (170). She is drawn towards the art materials and starts painting. She befriends Anuj and Sagar, who are also admitted in the hospital for treatment.

During the psychotherapy session, Dr. Madhusudan motivates her that she has a great writing skill and should nurture it. He also encourages her that she is a brave girl and she trusts him completely. He gives his childhood books for her to read. She faces great difficulty in reading and comprehending them. So, Dr. Namita Deshmukh reads and Ankita writes everything to keep it in her memory. At the end of the sixth week, she no longer needed to write out the passages to remember it. She reads a book at a single sitting and feels happy for it.

Ankita's overweight due to her passive lifestyle is also gradually reduced through physical exercise. When the treatment is over, she feels both happy and sad to leave the hospital. When she leaves the hospital, she has gifted her paintings to Dr. Madhusudan, Dr. Namita, Anuj and Sagar. Though her father tries to convince her to continue her M.B.A., she opposes. She fosters a broader view of life and she knows what she wants in her life. She chooses to take up the creative writing course. In a letter to Vaibhav, she writes in a philosophical manner that "I have realised that love and faith can indeed work miracles. I have realised that love and friendship do have a power" (201). She celebrates her life and develops a strong feeling that the celebrations would last a lifetime. She regains hope in her life and begins to look at life in a positive way. Ankita, who has suffered severely from Bipolar Disorder and even tried to commit suicide, begins a new phase in her life. She creates new light on the connection between external circumstances and the inner sufferings. Shenoy has beautifully portrayed Ankita's sufferings of Bipolar Disorder and how she finds hope to restart her life.

In an interview with Preeti Shenoy, she explains the reason for taking Bipolar Disorder as a theme in the novel – "Bipolar Disorder is slowly gaining awareness in India but continues to be treated as somewhat of a taboo topic in most households. The book is based on a true story and when I first heard the story, it moved me so much that I decided it had to be written and shared with the world." (Life Is What You Make It- An Interview with Preeti Shenoy). In the contemporary society, the youngsters are more prone to suicidal tendencies. It is because they do not have the tendency to accept failures as a part of life and lose hope in life. Hope is essential to keep one mentally strong. This novel depicts that one should not lose hope and courage at any phase of life. Though one faces the most critical situation in one's life, there is always a way out for it and suicide cannot be a solution to any problem. Bipolar Disorder is a mental illness that could happen to anyone and one should not lose hope at that situation. Even in the midst of the darkest circumstances in life, if people have hope, light will appear. Through Ankita's character the readers understand one can find strength and meaning in any circumstances even when things fall apart.

Works Cited:

Shenoy, Preeti. *Life is what you make it*. New Delhi: Srishti Publishers & Distributors, 2011.

---. "Life Is What You Make It- An Interview with Preeti Shenoy." *Spark*, 6 Aug.

2011, www.sparkthemagazine.com/life-is-whst-you-make-it-an-interview-with-preeti-shenoy/.

Dubey, Shruti. "Life as you make it: the Reaffirmation of Life values (With special reference to Shenoy's Life is What you make it)." *Research Scholar- An International Refereed e-Journal of Literary Explorations*, vol.2, no. 2, May 2014, pp. 433-37.