

## **NUTS AND BOLTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM IN PREETI SHENOY'S *LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT*: A VESTIGE OF HOPE**

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### **Abstract**

Psychological realism — a type of literary realism — is a genre with outrageous growth in the field of literature. It has come into prominence in the early twentieth century with great vigor. Psychological realism is a fictional narration that focuses on the character. It's a character-driven methodology in the arena of literary studies, which hubs on the motives behind the role of the character. This paper tries to examine the elements of psychological realism in the fictional narration of Preeti Shenoy's *Life Is What You Make It*. The story revolves around the life of Preeti Shenoy's fictional character — Ankita Sharma, a young good looking girl who hails from Cochin, the protagonist of the fiction. The life journey of Ankita Sharma during her stage of bipolar depression forms a realistic portrayal of the suffering which the reader can associate and empathise with. Through this, the writer intends to spread positive vibes in the minds of the readers for holistic well being.

### **Keywords**

Character-driven approach, Determination, New normal, Psychological realism

### **Introduction**

Literature and psychology are interrelated wherein both deal with human nature. Both can share a robust correlation in sharing human thoughts, emotions, perceptions, conflicts, memories, sorrows, desires, reconciliations, and much more. In literature, psychological realism plays an invigorating role, through which the emotional, mental, and spiritual lives of the characters are explored. Psychological realism is a fictional technique, which is used comprehensively in modern times by young writers to capture the realistic mirror image of society and human lives. In the progression of touching human emotions and thoughts, writers employ psychological realism as a key factor in tying the stories in the field of literature. Psychological realism is no longer an exception in the hands of the young, budding Indian writer Preeti Shenoy, who has contributed voluminously to the field of Indian fiction through her heart-rendering tales.

## Objectives

This research article intends to trace the following objectives in the fiction *Life Is What You Make It* by Preeti Shenoy.

- To study the unembellished narrative technique used by the writer
- To trace the element of realism as illustrated by Preeti Shenoy
- To explore the mental trauma of Ankita Sharma — the protagonist of the story

## Analysis

Preeti Shenoy narrates the story in the first-person narrative in a lucid way which adds charm to her stories. She spreads the carpet of realism for all her literary narration which makes her stories more appealing and heart-touching. Being the popular women writer among the best-selling authors, Preeti Shenoy beautifully weaves the life of the protagonist — Ankita Sharma, with a realistic narration of all the intricacies faced by her during her stage of adolescence. This research article tries to examine the fictional narration of Preeti Shenoy's *Life Is What You Make It*, from the perception of psychological realism.

*Life Is What You Make It* is a story about a young girl Ankita Sharma, who is in her stage of adolescence. This fiction explores the journey of depression in the life of Ankita Sharma. In this context, Sobirova Zarnigor (2019) expresses the view on realism as “a straightforward description of life's conflicts is one of the main requirements of realism literature” (189). The element of psychological realism could be traced in the fictional narration of Preeti Shenoy's *Life Is What You Make It*, which indeed gives a detailed description of the protagonist's conflict in life. Further, it brings forth the journey of the protagonist focusing particularly on her thoughts, feelings, and emotions predominantly during her state of bipolar depression. Preeti Shenoy exquisitely traces the life journey of Ankita Sharma and her psychological well-being by touching the heart of the readers through her simple artistic narrative style. Bihungum Bista and et al., (2016) quote Hall who put forths the problems in the stage of adolescence as

Adolescence is the transitional stage of development between childhood and adulthood, representing the period of time during which a person experiences a variety of biological and emotional changes. Hall denoted this period as “Storm and Stress” and states “conflict at this developmental stage is normal”. During this period, adolescents suffer from various forms of problems Hall denoted this period as “Storm and Stress” and states “conflict at this developmental stage is normal. (1)

The elements of realism could be traced in the narration of Ankita Sharma's journey during her adolescence stage — a period of storm and stress. Srijia Sanyal affirms (2016) “Psychological realism in simple terms can be put as literature of inward human thoughts, emotions, feelings, and personality” (248). Here the writer, Preeti Shenoy pictures the narration by giving importance to the protagonists' thoughts and emotions instead of simply narrating the story. Further, Srijia (2016) comments on psychological realism in the following words,

Considered as a faithful and consistent depiction of human thoughts and feelings, psychological realism is mainly concerned with the analysis and characterization of the psyche of the characters in the story rather than the development of plot. (248)

While commenting on realism in literary narration Sobirova Zarnigor (2019) puts forth

But realism, as a literary method or literary direction, requires that the writer consistently adhere to the principle of living and true reflection of reality, and consciously study the human and the outside world (189).

Some of the characteristics features of realistic narration can be traced in this novel. At the outset, the novel focuses on the ordinary people, place, and situation which the reader can easily associate with. In this narration, the writer sets her protagonist from a well-known place in south India, Cochin — which is a very familiar place for Indian readers. Besides, the readers can easily associate the place Cochin, which is a celebrated port city and popularly known as the Queen of Arabian Sea. The author straightforwardly reveals the setting of the novel in the opening lines of the novel, which contributes to the element of realism. The life of Ankita Sharma, her family, friends, etc belong to a middle-class social setup. Henceforth, the readers can connect easily to the novel. Themes like family, love, commitments to responsibilities, struggles, wealth, and status are some of the predominant realistic themes. The plausible plot around the life of Ankita Sharma, the problems which she encounters during the state of bipolar depression, and her journey in the National Mental Health Institute supplement evidence to the element of psychological realism.

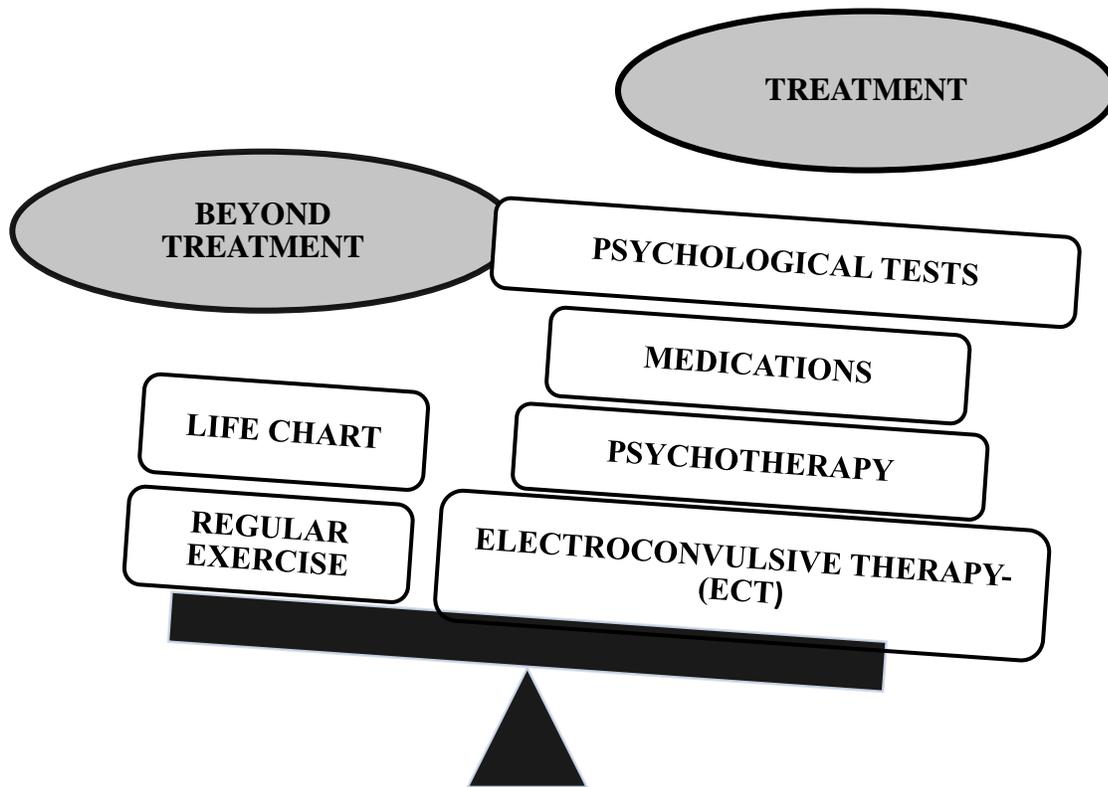
This narration is a close meticulous comprehensive analysis of the character Ankita Sharma which reflects reality. Preeti Shenoy focuses on the unique issue of bipolar disorder with a simple artistic narration of thoughts and facts through which the readers can connect easily. Further, she kindles the empathy of the readers through her detailed description of the disorder and its consequence. During the stay at the National Mental Health Institute, Ankita Sharma's experience, and her treatment forms the crux of the narration. Preeti Shenoy says

Bipolar disorder is a serious brain disorder that causes dramatic shifts in moods, energy levels, attitudes and ability to carry out everyday tasks . . . it develops typically in late adolescence or early adulthood. (206)

The detailed narration revolves around the life of Ankita, the treatment which she undergoes in the hands of expert doctors, and her new normal after the treatment result in creating a strong bond in the minds of the reader

### **Bipolar Disorder— Nature of the treatment**

Ankita Sharma experiences various stages of the treatment in the hands of the expert doctors at the National Mental Health Institute.



*Figure 1: Ankita Sharma's Stage of Psychological Treatment in The National Mental Health Institute*

### **Treatment**

- **Psychological tests**

First and foremost, after her rescue from suicide attempts, her parents insist on visiting a psychiatrist. After visiting the clinic, she felt like “a sacrificial lamb waiting to be executed” (136). Ankita takes a few psychological tests under the instruction of Dr. Mukta Nagraj. The experience of Ankita Sharma during her psychological test reflects the realistic portrayal of a common man. She feels, “Hatred oozed out of my pores like molten lava but I concealed it. I just could not bring myself to smile back at her smug” (139).

- **Medications**

Due to the mental depression, the doctor puts Ankita Sharma on medications. The doctor diagnoses her as “She has severe depression. We should start her on medication immediately. That will help her a lot. Otherwise her condition will worsen” (140). The interesting and attractive things seem to be drab for Ankita Sharma. The writer describes very closely all the real intricacies of the character Ankita which pulls the readers.

- **Psychotherapy**

Psychotherapy or talk therapy works very well for Ankita Sharma during her stay at the National Mental Health Institute. She enjoyed the companionship of Dr. Madhusudan and Dr. Namita. They help Ankita in acquiring self-confidence through this treatment of psychotherapy. “The psychotherapy sessions involved talking to whichever doctor was assigned to you” (178). The doctors impart many promising statements that indeed help in the speedy recovery of the patients. During one such visit, Dr. Namita motivates Ankita with assuring words, “Ankita, you have been under tremendous stress in the past months. Don’t worry. You are making good progress. I will come back tomorrow” (187).

- **Electroconvulsive Therapy**

The elements of psychological realism can be traced in all the stages of Ankita Sharma in the form of the description of her pain, sorrow, suffering, feeling, etc. She expresses her intense suffering and feeling after she realizes the truth of witnessing Electroconvulsive therapy

That took the wind out of my sails. ECT? Electroconvulsive Therapy? I was dumbfounded. I staggered under the enormity of the realization . . .

Why in the world? And how is it that nobody had told me about it? Had I been administered Electric shock? Oh God. (162)

### **Beyond treatment**

- **Life chart with regular exercise**

A life chart with proper planning is given to Ankita Sharma during her stay in the Occupational therapy wing. It covers her daily routine from 6.30 a.m to 10.30 p.m. including her wake-up time, personal grooming, exercise, breakfast, doctor rounds, recreation, lunch, leisure, outdoor sports, psychotherapy, yoga, dinner, and bedtime. She likes her life chart and feels like, “In fact, I was happy to have something to do finally” (171).

After the treatment in the hands of doctors, Ankita could manage her ordeal and establishes remarkable progress with her strong will power and determination. She could bounce back to new normal and emerges as the master of her fate.

### **Conclusion**

Despite her mental depression, she could bounce back in her life due to her strong will power and determination. Preeti Shenoy tries to prove that life is indeed unpredictable through her fictional character Ankita Sharma and tries to express so realistically that life may take a sudden unexpected turn through the psychological journey of her protagonist. Thus this realistic reflection instills a strong message to the community stating the fact of how life can take a different turn rather than what is planned. Through the hurdles of the protagonist in facing life problems, the writer tries to impart a resilient sense of hope and determination in the minds of the readers. Preeti Shenoy tries to pass a strong message that humans can overcome anything in life including destiny. Life is what you make it is certainly true in the case of Ankita Sharma.

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