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## THE JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY IN PREETI SHENOY'S *LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT*

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### **Abstract:**

*The theme of self-discovery is a prominent and recurring motif in Indian English literature. Authors such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri often explore characters' journeys of self-realization as they navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity, personal desires and familial obligations. These narratives frequently depict protagonists grappling with cultural hybridity, displacement, and the search for belonging, as they strive to reconcile their Indian heritage with Western influences. Through introspective prose and nuanced character development, Indian English literature illuminates the transformative power of self-discovery, portraying it as a means of overcoming internal conflicts, challenging societal norms, and forging authentic identities in a rapidly changing world.*

*This research paper explores the journey of self-discovery in Preeti Shenoy's *Life Is What You Make It*, focusing on the protagonist, Ankita, as she navigates the complexities of identity, mental health, and societal expectations. The narrative*

*highlights Ankita's struggles with depression and the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, illustrating the challenges faced by contemporary women in India. Through a feminist lens, the study examines how Shenoy portrays the inner conflicts and triumphs of her characters, emphasizing themes of resilience and personal empowerment. Ankita's journey symbolizes the broader quest for self-acceptance and the importance of pursuing one's passions amidst adversity. The paper delves into key moments that catalyze her transformation, showcasing the significance of support systems and personal agency in the healing process. By analyzing the intersections of mental health and societal norms, this research contributes to the discourse on women's literature in India, advocating for greater awareness and understanding of mental health issues. Ultimately, the article underscores the idea that self-discovery is a dynamic process, encouraging readers to embrace their individuality and carve their own paths in life.*

**Keywords:** *Self-Discovery, Mental Health, Empowerment, Identity, Societal Expectations.*



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## Introduction:

Self-discovery is a crucial theme in modern narratives, resonating deeply with contemporary audiences. It reflects the universal journey of understanding oneself, making choices, and finding one's place in an increasingly complex world. In an era marked by rapid change—socially, culturally, and technologically—stories of self-discovery allow readers to explore personal and collective identities, navigate internal conflicts, and confront societal expectations. This theme encourages readers to reflect on their own lives and challenges, fostering empathy and resilience. It serves as a reminder that personal growth often emerges from struggle, and that the journey toward self-awareness can lead to empowerment and fulfillment. In literature, self-discovery often acts as a catalyst for character development, shaping their relationships and ultimate transformations.

Several prominent Indian female novelists have explored the theme of self-discovery in their works: Anita Desai, known for her introspective narratives, portrays characters on journeys of self-realization. Her novel “Clear Light of Day” examines the complexities of family relationships and personal growth. Arundhati Roy, in her Booker Prize-winning novel “The God of Small Things”, delves into themes of identity, forbidden love, and self-discovery against the backdrop of Kerala's social and political landscape. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel “The Namesake” explores cultural identity and self-discovery through the protagonist's journey. Shobha De explores themes of women's empowerment and self-discovery in urban Indian settings and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, in her novel “The Mistress of Spices,” presents female protagonist on journey of self-discovery with blending elements of magical realism with explorations of cultural identity. These authors deal with themes of cultural identity, gender roles, and personal transformation into their narratives, offering nuanced perspectives on the process of self-discovery in the context of Indian society and beyond.

Preeti Shenoy drew inspiration from her own experiences and observations of mental health issues, particularly regarding the stigma surrounding them in Indian society. Her background in psychology also informs her understanding of the emotional complexities faced by individuals, especially women. She has often cited her desire to address real-life issues and provide relatable narratives as significant influences in her writing. In *Life Is What You Make It*, she combines elements of her personal journey with broader social themes, allowing her characters to resonate



with readers facing similar challenges. Additionally, Shenoy's engagement with contemporary issues, such as the pressures of academic success and the importance of mental health awareness, reflects a broader societal shift toward recognizing and discussing these topics. Her writing aims to foster understanding and acceptance, encouraging readers to confront their own struggles and embark on their paths of self-discovery. Shenoy's novel serves as both a mirror and a guide, illuminating the complexities of self-discovery while emphasizing the importance of mental health and personal agency in shaping one's life.

Preeti Shenoy began her literary career with *Life Is What You Make It*, which received widespread acclaim for its honest portrayal of mental health issues. Shenoy's works often feature strong, relatable characters navigating the challenges of contemporary life, particularly from a woman's perspective. Her writing style is characterized by clarity and simplicity, drawing readers into the emotional journeys of her characters. Over the years, Shenoy has received multiple literary awards. As an author, she continues to inspire readers with her thoughtful explorations of personal growth and resilience, solidifying her place in modern Indian literature.

*Life Is What You Make It* is a captivating story that explores the intricacies of mental health, identity, and personal empowerment. The story revolves around Ankita, a young woman grappling with her ambitions, societal expectations, and her struggle with depression. Set against the backdrop of contemporary India, the narrative delves into Ankita's journey of self-discovery as she navigates the challenges posed by family pressures, academic expectations, and her own mental health issues. Shenoy's portrayal of Ankita is both relatable and poignant, capturing the internal conflicts many faces in a rapidly changing world. Through her experiences, the novel addresses the stigma surrounding mental health, emphasizing the importance of seeking help and understanding one's emotions. The story encourages readers to embrace their individuality and make conscious choices about their lives, highlighting that personal fulfillment often requires resilience and courage. The novel ultimately advocates for the belief that one's life can be shaped by the choices they make, inspiring readers to pursue their dreams and seek happiness.

Ankita is a bright and ambitious young woman who faces the pressures of societal expectations, family obligations, and her own dreams. As she navigates her college years, Ankita experiences the



highs and lows of life, including the excitement of new friendships and the challenges of academic stress. However, her life takes a darker turn as she grapples with depression, which impacts her relationships and ambitions. Throughout the story, Ankita's journey is marked by moments of self-discovery, resilience, and personal growth. She learns to confront her fears, redefine her aspirations, and ultimately take charge of her life. The plot culminates in her realization that happiness and fulfillment are shaped by the choices she makes, reinforcing the theme that *Life Is What You Make It*. Through her experiences, the novel offers a powerful message about the significance of mental health and the courage to pursue one's true path.

Ankita's experiences compel her to confront her identity, values, and aspirations. Throughout the novel, she navigates the expectations placed on her by family and society, which often conflict with her personal desires. Her struggles with mental health serve as a catalyst for deeper introspection, prompting her to explore who she truly is beyond external pressures. As she grapples with her depression, she learns to recognize her strengths, vulnerabilities, and the importance of authenticity. Her journey is marked by significant milestones that contribute to her personal growth. She learns valuable lessons about resilience, the importance of seeking help, and the power of self-acceptance. Through her relationships and experiences, she gains insights into the nature of love, friendship, and support. This growth is not linear; it involves setbacks and challenges, emphasizing that personal development is a continuous process. Ultimately, the novel illustrates that self-discovery and personal growth are intertwined, with each influencing the other. Ankita's evolution empowers her to make conscious choices about her life, embodying the message that one's journey toward happiness and fulfillment is shaped by both inner reflection and proactive decision-making. The novel illustrates the complexities of self-discovery through the protagonist Ankita's struggles with mental health, the dynamics of her relationships, and her ultimate transformation, emphasizing that personal growth often emerges from navigating internal conflicts and societal pressures.

Ankita Sharma is introduced as a bright, ambitious young woman with dreams of pursuing a successful career. She is academically inclined, driven by her aspirations and the expectations placed upon her by her family and society. Initially, Ankita appears confident and determined, embodying the typical image of a modern Indian woman striving for excellence. However, beneath her outward success lies a vulnerability that she struggles to acknowledge. As the narrative unfolds,



Ankita's psychological struggles become increasingly prominent. She experiences severe bouts of depression, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy, which starkly contrast her initial portrayal. These mental health issues are exacerbated by academic pressures, familial expectations, and the societal stigma surrounding mental health. Ankita's journey through her depression is central to the plot, highlighting her internal conflict and the challenge of reconciling her desires with the reality of her emotional struggles.

Ankita's family plays a significant role in her life, representing both support and pressure. Her parents have high expectations for her, which contribute to her stress and feelings of inadequacy. While they love her, their desire for her to conform to traditional standards creates a conflict that she must navigate. Her friendships are crucial as well, providing moments of support and camaraderie. However, they also highlight her isolation when she struggles to share her mental health challenges. These relationships underscore the importance of connection and understanding, as her friends sometimes struggle to grasp the depth of her struggles. Romantic relationships also significantly impact Ankita's journey. Her relationship with her boyfriend introduces themes of love, support, and vulnerability. At times, this romance serves as a source of strength and encouragement, helping her confront her fears. However, it can also complicate her emotional state, as she grapples with the desire for acceptance and the fear of losing herself in the relationship.

Through these dynamics, the novel illustrates how both familial and romantic relationships influence Ankita's path to self-discovery, reflecting the intricate balance between love, expectation, and personal identity. Ultimately, her interactions with these supporting characters enrich her character development, emphasizing the theme of resilience in the face of adversity.

### **Conclusion:**

Preeti Shenoy's "*Life Is What You Make It*" illuminates the profound journey of self-discovery undertaken by the protagonist, Ankita. Through her struggles with bipolar disorder and societal expectations, Ankita emerges as a symbol of resilience and personal growth. The novel effectively portrays how confronting one's inner demons and embracing vulnerability can lead to profound self-awareness and empowerment. Shenoy's narrative not only highlights the importance of mental health awareness but also emphasizes the transformative power of self-acceptance and



determination. Ultimately, the story serves as a poignant reminder that life's challenges, when faced with courage and perseverance, can become catalysts for personal evolution and a deeper understanding of oneself.

The novel serves as a powerful reminder that self-discovery is not a linear path but a series of trials and triumphs that shape one's identity. Through Ankita's experiences, Shenoy emphasizes that true happiness and fulfillment come from within, and the key to unlocking this lies in self-acceptance and resilience. The narrative encourages readers to reflect on their own lives, inspiring them to embrace their flaws and pursue their dreams with unwavering determination. Ultimately, "*Life Is What You Make It*" is a celebration of the human spirit's capacity to overcome challenges and redefine one's destiny, making it a compelling read for anyone on their own journey of self-discovery.

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