



Between Tradition and Globalization: The Evolution of Feminine Identity in Preeti Shenoy's *Life is What You Make It*

Proshanta Sarkar & Prof. (Dr.) Gauri Shankar Jha

Abstract:

This paper discusses the construction of femininity in the novel *Life is What You Make It* by Preeti Shenoy and how the central character, Ankita Sharma, goes through her identity in the post-liberalization India as a young woman. This paper explores the clash between the old Indian values and the new global forces on women characters by a critical examination of the text. Another aspect of how the novel relates to the genre of Chick Lit and Working Girl Lit is also reviewed in this paper, as well as the views on mental health, self-evolution, and the demands of society. Through the case of Ankita, the paper brings to the fore the challenges and opportunities of the post-millennial Indian women as they attempt to remain with their identities in the fast-transforming social scene. This paper examines the impact of cyberspace on feminine identity and the influence of globalisation on the aspirations and decisions of the young Indian women. It also examines the way the novel can be included in the greater debate about femininity in contemporary Indian literature. This paper aims at illuminating on the evolving nature of feminine identity and the engagement of tradition and modernity in shaping the lives of women of young Indian women as this sets the novel *Life is What You Make It* within the context of post-liberalization India.

Keywords: Femininity, Globalization, Mental Health, Post-liberalization, Identity, Tradition, Modernity, Feminist Criticism, Cyber Space

Introduction: Preeti Shenoy and the Landscape of Contemporary Indian Literature

Preeti Shenoy, a leading writer in the modern Indian literature has created a niche through her interesting storylines in her novels which touch the hearts of a great number of people, especially the young adults. Her novel *Life is What You Make It* is one of the most heart-wrenching accounts of femininity, mental health, and personal development during the post liberalization era of India. The novel was published in 2011 but it reflects the spirit of the time during which a country in transition is being experienced wherein traditional values collide with the powers of globalization and modernization.

The novels of Shenoy are especially relevant to the Indian literature because it fills the gap between the commercial fiction and more serious literary fiction. Very simple and entertaining is his writing style, which comes under the chick lit genre. Yet she addresses some serious topics, which makes it more than just entertainment. *Life is What You Make It* is an example of such a balance and a relatable and thought-provoking story.

The main character of the novel Ankita Sharma can be viewed as an instrument with the help of which the reader can explore the issues of feminine identity in modern India. Being a young woman, growing up in the 1990s, Ankita reflects personal encounters of a generation of struggling Indian women, as it tries to find its way in a changing society. In the narrative of Ankita, Shenoy develops the themes of ambition, love, mental health, and self-discovery, the

latter being explained through the prism of evolving India.

Post-Liberalized Feminine Identity: Ankita as a Symbol of Change

Post-liberalized feminine identity is the core concept of the explanation of the character of Ankita, her development in the course of the novel. With economic liberalization of India in 1991, there was a major change in the socio-economic life of the nation hence creating new opportunities to women in terms of education, career and freedom. Ankita is the symbol of this transformation, as she is a representative of the generation of young women who are in the middle of tradition and modernity.

Shenoy makes a great effort to depict how Ankita is unable to balance her ambitions and desires with the demands made on her by her family and society. This internal conflict is evident in the following passage:

No more school uniforms. No more strict rules. No more being treated as a kid. I would be 18 on my next birthday and officially an adult. I felt excited as legally it meant I was eligible to marry and vote. The flip side immediately struck me too. I would no longer be a juvenile and could be arrested too. Of course, at that time I had no idea how dangerously close I'd come to it. It was an exhilarating felling — like a caterpillar emerging out of a cocoon. I could hardly wait. (Shenoy, 2011, p.19)

Summary of the meaning of post-liberal feminine identity, which is the negotiation between individual ambitions and social values, we come across in this passage. Here we have also found that the experience of Ankita is similar to that of most young Indian women who, after the liberalisation, come under various options. But there remains again the difficulty to work taking any option in the society because it remains largely traditional.

Globalization and its Impact on Feminine Aspirations

The working out of globalization contributes greatly to the development of the world of Ankita and also the perception of what role she is playing in the world. With the coming of global economy in India, the country was also introducing new streams of ideas, cultural influences and opportunities. It was an introduction to alternative thinking of gender roles, career choice, and freedom of choice to a young female like Ankita. We will gradually know how Preeti Shenoy skillfully demonstrates how globalization affects the dreams of Ankita. Ankita chooses to study MBA, a degree which was extremely popular during the post-liberalization India, and it is symbolic of her aspiration to get a position in a new global economy. This is a break from the old-fashioned demands on women, and it indicates the rising trends of feminine ambition in India. The novel is also about the influence of globalization on personal relationships. Ankita and her perception of love navigate between the Indian conservative values and also more Westernised ideas of dating and courtship. When it comes to romance with Vaibhav, this cultural hybridity is the feature of post-liberalization, and it proves more intensity to such female characters and female images in the novel.

Post-Millennial Perspectives: Bridging Generations

Perfect view of femininity in the post-millennium world can be seen in the novel of Preeti Shenoy, *Life is What You Make It*, though it was set in the 1990s. Offering the story of the journey that Ankita passes through to a modern audience, Shenoy establishes a generational connection and enables the readers to consider the way the feminine identity transformed throughout the decades since the liberalization.

The theme of mental health that is explored in the novel, which has received growing popularity in recent years, is especially close to post-millennial readers. The story of Ankita and her fight with bipolar disorder and recovery is a potent story that breaks the stigma and teaches people to learn. Such an element of the novel is especially topical in the modern context

of mental health discussion and gender since concerns regarding mental health of women have traditionally been neglected or misjudged.

The way Shenoy depicts the strength of Ankita and her ambition to eliminate the problem of her mental illness before the audiences that believe in authenticity of the material, and are not afraid to talk about their personal challenges. The following passage illustrates Ankita's resolve:

I am not like you. I won elections in my college. I used to be the Secretary of the Arts Association. I was doing my management from a fine business school. I am not like you all. (Shenoy, 2011, p.5)

This shows the narrator who asserts her identity and accomplishments beyond her current situation of mental health.

I want it all to end. I don't want to see yet another doctor. I am tired of it all. What is this doctor going to tell me that others haven't? (Shenoy, 2011, p.5)

This expresses the narrator's frustration with repeatedly having to seek treatment for mental health which suggests a desire to move beyond that.

I look at the anguish on my dad's face and the look of constant worry on my mother's brow, just like those unwanted notices stuck on the roadside walls. I don't feel sorry for them at all, though I am supposed to be. I don't even wish I could erase them. (Shenoy, 2011, p.5)

This indicates the detachment of Ankita from others' concerns about their condition which suggests a focus on their own perspective and recovery.

Such a bold statement of self-determination of Ankita has also been correlated with post-millennial ideals of self-acceptance and mental health advocacy and goes further to show how the work by Shenoy, even though written in a different epoch, can still be relevant to readers today.

Cyber Space and Feminine Identity: The Dawn of a New Era

Although the action of *Life is What You Make It* takes place at the time, when the internet was only getting a foothold in India, it foreshadows some of the issues that would come to dominate the discourse concerning feminine identity during the digital era. The experiences that Ankita undergoes in terms of letter writing and long-distance communication can be regarded as the forerunners of how cyber space was to influence feminine identity in the years that followed the setting of the novel.

Shenoy alludes to the revolutionary force of technology in creating relationships and allowing a platform through which one can express themselves. In spite of the fact that Ankita has no access to social media and online networks, her need to feel connected and her attempts to support relationships despite the distances precondition the ways in which cyber space will become a very important factor in allowing feminine identity to be formed in the further generations.

Investigating the written word in the novel as a form of self-expression and connection will have even more value when it is perceived through the prism of the modern digital communication. The letters written by Ankita to friends and loved ones can be considered as the same with the blogs, social media updates, and online discussion and forums which would turn out to become a crucial platform through which women would express themselves and find fellow women to associate with.

With the help of this, *Life is What You Make It* can be viewed as a kind of a transitional piece between the pre-digital and digital understandings of feminine identity hence encouraging the readers to reflect on how technology has simultaneously altered and accentuated how women are able to approach their personal and professional lives.

Life is What You Make It by Preeti Shenoy is placed at an intriguing crossroads of Chick Lit and Working Girl Lit two genres that became popular in the late 20th and early 21st century. Although the novel does not fall easily into either of the two categories, it draws its ground on both and develops a peculiar story that resonates with the lives of the young Indian women that undergo personal and career-related problems.

This person-oriented and romance-driven genre with its usual emphasis on the urban setting of young women, in this case, under the name of the main character, Ankita, has its reflection in the relationships that Ankita has and her experience of self-discovery. Love, heartbreak, and self-development explored in the novel fits into most of the themes of Chick Lit. Shenoy, however, adds a new level to these aspects basing it on the particular cultural background of the 1990s India and well-developed psychological commentary.

The text contains several lines that express a Chick Lit sensibility:

“I liked being adored. I liked the feeling of being so important to someone. I liked being the centre of someone’s world.” (Shenoy, 2011, p.22)

This shows the protagonist’s enjoyment of being the object of someone’s affection and admiration, which is a common theme in Chick Lit.

“A year flew by and I did not even feel it pass. Then when my 18th birthday was approaching, he decided that letters were just not enough. He said he wanted to talk to me.” (Shenoy, 2011, p.20)

The fast passage of time and the eagerness to transition from written letters to voice communication reflects the youthful, romantic sensibilities of Chick Lit.

“Getting to talk to Vaibhav on the phone involved putting together a complex combat mission much like U.S Airborne division of paratroopers in World War Two.” (Shenoy, 2011, p.20)

The dramatic, playful language used to describe the efforts required to speak on the phone demonstrates the lighthearted, humorous tone often found in Chick Lit.

Here we find the elements of Chick Lit that Shenoy has integrated, namely the emphasis on romance and personal relationships, and the fact that some more serious questions of identity and self-actualization are also being addressed here and this raises the story above the conventions of the genre.

The novel also includes elements of Working Girl Lit especially in how it portrays Ankita in terms of her educational and career ambitions. Working Girl Lit normally targets young women in the workforce and the struggle of establishing a career. Although most of the novel still has Ankita in school, her aspirations and her subsequent experience of entering the workforce are not out of place with the tropes of the genre.

What is interesting about Shenoy novel is the fact that it delves into these themes in the framework of post liberalization India where women had more opportunities but were still limited by the norms of society. The following passage illustrates this tension:

Never in my life had I seen so many women or girls in one place. Throughout my life I had studied in co-educational schools where men were a part of my world. Suddenly being thrust into an atmosphere without any, had taken me completely by surprise. Everywhere I turned, looked or went it was women, women and more women. The college must have had at least three thousand students and it seemed as if almost all of them had turned up at the college auditorium for the welcome and induction at the start of the new academic year. (Shenoy, 2011, p.19)

Two elements like chick lit and working girl lit are blended with subtle exploration of Indian society and culture. And in this way, Preeti Shenoy creates a narrative that transcends genre boundaries and offers a unique perspective on femininity in contemporary India.

Mental Health and Feminine Identity: Breaking the Stigma

The description of mental health problems, and especially bipolar disorder, is one of the most vivid details of the novel, *Life is What You Make It*, and it has been discussed openly, making this a core of the story about Ankita. Preeti Shenoy makes a breakthrough in Indian literature, particularly in popular literary genre. Determination of mental health has been addressed as the issue related to feminine identity in the novel, and it is specially noted due to the absence of stigmas in society and the subtle depiction of a mental illness in a young woman.

The description of the bipolar disorder of Ankita is highly realistic and sensitive by Preeti Shenoy. She does not hesitate to discuss the ugly points of the condition, such as manic phases and depressive moods. Meanwhile, she represents Ankita as a multidimensional and intricate person, whose identity cannot be limited to her mental health issues.

The following passage illustrates the depth and complexity of Shenoy's treatment of mental health:

"I hate it all. It fills me with a kind of dread. I don't belong here. I ought not to even be here in the first place. But I am, and there is nothing I can do about it."
(Shenoy, 2011, p.4)

This shows the protagonist's strong aversion and sense of not belonging in the mental health setting.

"I loathe them all. The whole lot of them. They know nothing. My face is expressionless. I am incapable of feeling empathy. It is as though my heart has turned to wood. Rotting, festering wood that gnaws at the core of my being and threatens to drag me in." (Shenoy, 2011, p.5)

This reflects the protagonist's deep cynicism and lack of emotional connection which are suggestive of a mental health struggle.

"I wince. That is not how it is, I want to scream. But I don't want them to think that I am out of control. So I dig my finger nails into my skin to prevent me from talking. I grit my teeth and listen." (Shenoy, 2011, p.5)

This shows the protagonist's internal battle to maintain control and composure, despite the strong urge to protest how their situation is being characterized.

Besides shedding light on the personal experience that Ankita had with bipolar disorder, this text also touches upon such larger topics as the stigma surrounding the condition in society, self-acceptance, and the concept of redefining femininity and strength. Representing the mental health struggles as a reflection of the range of human experiences instead of the devaluation of Ankita or her femininity, Shenoy breaks the historical ideas of a strong and successful woman.

Education and Empowerment: Redefining Feminine Success

Education is a very important aspect in the life of Ankita and it is a means of empowering her. Shenoy relies on the experiences of Ankita in education to demonstrate how tertiary education reinforces the meaning of feminine success in the post-liberalization India. The novel portrays education not only as the way to the career promotion, but to self-discovery and personal development.

The choice of studying MBA is especially important because it can be a step into the world dominated by men, and Ankita is the first to take it. By the experiences of Ankita, Shenoy presents problems with women entering the world dominated by males and how education can be used as the means of defying gender conventions.

How education can serve as a tool to empower women in the Indian society can be addressed as another theme that has been examined in the novel. Although it breaks new grounds, it brings about strains with the established expectations. The fact that Ankita is fighting between her wants to pursue her studies and the pressure of her family and society is the problem of many young Indian women.

Love, Relationships, and Feminine Agency

In her description of love and relationship in the novel *Life is What You Make It*, Preeti Shenoy portrays a delicate theme: the nature of feminine agency. The novel explores the relationship between young women and love, how they are struggling to find their way in the world of love while at the same time attempting to preserve their individuality and personal goals.

The novel questions the fact that women should attain romantic fulfilment as the ultimate end but it comes with other elements of an assumed fulfilling life. The learning process of Ankita is to know how to put her personal needs and dreams first even at the expense of her love relationships. The feminine agency depicted in relationships is especially meaningful when considering the Indian context, where the societal desire to get married and focus on family in the first place can often be incompatible with the personal and professional goals of women.

The following passage illustrates Ankita's growth in this area:

How do groups get formed in colleges? Some say that you gravitate instinctively towards people you can relate to and then gradually over the months a bond develops. It was not like that with my class. It felt as though a snooker player had hit a single hard strike and we, like the snooker balls, had scattered in all directions, random balls coming together with no predetermined plan. But of course, in reality, each shot is planned with precision and each strike is made with a purpose, and on deeper contemplation you realize that the balls came together for a reason after all. (Shenoy, 2011, p.24)

This excerpt showcases how Shenoy portrays the evolution of the understanding of love and relationships by Ankita and also emphasizes the importance of maintaining one's identity and agency within romantic partnerships.

Navigating Tradition and Modernity: The Synthesis of Feminine Identity

Shenoy, throughout the novel *Life is What You Make It*, ponders the conflict between tradition and modernity that has defined the lives of several young Indian women during the post liberalization period. Ankita has come in between the two forces, and she is caught between the two values. One is her traditional bringing up, and the other one is the opportunities and challenges of a fast modernising India.

The novel is not about this being a dichotomy of old and new, but the younger woman, such as Ankita, balances both the traditional and modern so as to present unique identities. This is seen in many situations of the life of Ankita, as the professional life she leads, her relationship, and the way she deals with mental health.

Much of the subtlety in the description of Shenoy helps us to recognise the importance of cultural tradition and the necessity of development, especially in such aspects as mental health awareness and gender equality. We get the proposal from this novel that through the experience of Ankita, who balances the two possibilities of honouring cultural heritage and also appreciating positive changes, the Indian women should take the path accordingly.

The Evolution of Feminine Archetypes in Indian Literature

In the development of feminine archetype within Indian literature, Preeti Shenoy's famous novel *Life is What You Make It* plays an important role. Here, Preeti Shenoy introduces a new heroine who is not belonging to the conventional image of women as we found in Indian fiction. Rather, she is a top character, and her name is Ankita Sharma. This portion deals with the way in which Ankita as a character develops and surpasses the challenges that try to make the women more feminine conventionally.

The women in Indian literature have been depicted as stereotypical characters, and it includes some options like sacrificial mother, obedient wife, or defiant stranger. These archetypes may be accepted as the part of the literary canon, but they do not reflect the nuance

Between Tradition and Globalization: The Evolution of Feminine Identity in Preeti Shenoy's *Life is What You Make It*

of the lives of modern Indian women. Ankita, being a protagonist, is a break of these stereotypical representations.

Ankita is a complex and lively character designed by Shenoy. She is also an ambitious, vulnerable, strong-willed, and uncertain person, independent and appreciating her relationships. This complication gives Ankita the chance to go beyond the classic archetypes and become a more realistic and easier to relate character to the modern-day reader. Ankita internally struggles with societal expectations and cares for her own desires:

The first felling I had when I entered the college gates was that of breathlessness. I had hurried to make it in time for the first day at college. I could not believe that my school days were actually over and I was officially a college student. No more school uniforms. No more strict rules. No more being treated as a kid. I would be 18 on my next birthday and officially an adult. I felt excited as legally it meant I was eligible to marry and vote. The flip side immediately struck me too. I would no longer be a juvenile and could be arrested too. Of course, at that time I had no idea how dangerously close I'd come to it. It was an exhilarating felling- like a caterpillar emerging out of a cocoon. I could hardly wait. (Shenoy, 2011, p.19)

This passage demonstrates how Shenoy's portrayal of Ankita contributes to a more nuanced and multidimensional representation of women in Indian literature. By allowing Ankita to embody seemingly contradictory qualities and roles, Shenoy challenges the notion of fixed feminine archetypes and presents a more fluid and realistic conception of feminine identity.

The Impact of *Life is What You Make It* on Indian Popular Literature

Life is What You Make It has already left a trace in the garden of Indian popular literature after it became available in 2011. In this section, the reception of the novel and its impact on further novels will be discussed, as well as its contribution to the development of discourse over the issues of women in Indian fiction.

The novel had a vast reception when it was released and was widely praised by critics and readers. Its open way of discussing the topic of the mental illness, especially in the life of a young woman, was acclaimed to have paved a new path in the Indian popular fiction. The commercial success of the novel proved that there was a large audience when it comes to stories that touched on issues that were complex and real-world in the context of easy and enjoyable stories.

The effect of the novel has been witnessed in the ensuing series of works that address the same themes. After Shenoy, a number of Indian writers have written novels about experiences of the young women in modern day India and address issues that include mental health, career goals, and strike of balance between tradition and modernity. The trend has made the literary world in India more diverse and inclusive and offers the readers more narratives and viewpoints.

Furthermore, the destigmatization of mental health discourses in Indian society has been aided by *Life is What You Make It*. Through a sympathetic, realistic way of handling the world of Ankita and her bipolar disorder, Shenoy has contributed to open up the discussions on mental health problems especially when it comes to young women.

The influence of the novel is not limited to the world of literature as it has been affecting the wider cultural debate of the role of women in Indian society. It has become a sort of benchmark on discussions regarding the education of women, their career orientation and the difficulties young women have in terms of achieving their personal goals as well as the social burden on them.

Globalization and the Changing Face of Indian Femininity

As we mentioned above, the forces of globalization are influential in the world of *Life is What You Make It* and, consequently, its representation of femininity. This section discusses how the novel by Shenoy mirrors and provides comment on how globalization has affected identities

and ambitions of Indian women.

The novel is positioned against the background of economic liberalization of India in the 1990s, the time when India which opened up to the world markets and influences. Such change had far reaching consequences to the Indian society especially to young girls such as Ankita. Shenoy is clever enough to show how the exposure to the cultures and ideas of the world influences the worldview and aspirations of Ankita.

The shifting women education and career prospects is one of the most important characteristics of globalization that are embodied in the novel. The fact that Ankita is seeking MBA and pursuing a career means that the new opportunities that are emerging to the Indian woman in the global economy are becoming real. At the same time, Shenoy does not shy away from depicting the challenges and contradictions that come with these opportunities:

“Never in my life had I seen so many women or girls in one place. Throughout my life I had studied in co-educational schools where men were a part of my world. Suddenly being thrust into an atmosphere without any, had taken me completely by surprise Everywhere I turned, looked or went it was women, women and more women.” (Shenoy, 2011, p.19)

This highlights how Ankita, coming from a co-ed environment, is suddenly immersed in an allfemale college setting, which represents a distinct feminine space distinct from her previous experiences.

“I looked forward eagerly to the classes that would begin soon.” (Shenoy, 2011, p.19)

This shows Ankita’s excitement at the prospect of independence and new experiences in college which represents that the global, progressive influences are reaching to her.

“Almost instantly we had gravitated towards a gang or a group. There were sixty of us but we had all fallen into our groups, with whom we hung out, exchanged notes and had fun with.” (Shenoy, 2011, p.24)

This depicts how Ankita and her peers quickly formed their own social networks and peer groups within the all-female environment and navigate the challenges of this newfound independence.

Generally, the passage describes how opening of college by Ankita is a transition of her previously traditional and gender-mixed society into a more closed and female-focused world. It reflects the conflicts and adjustments of the Indian femininity in collisions with globalization forces.

This passage shows how Shenoy relies on the experiences of Ankita to discuss the issues of globalization and Indian femininity in the context of the complicated relationship. According to the novel, the effects that globalization has had on the identities of Indian women is not a mere rejection of tradition in favour of the western values, but is also not a blanket acceptance of the global culture. Rather it is portraying a subtle act of negotiation and integrations as young women such as Ankita are creating new forms of identities that are inspired by their cultural roots as well as the opportunities offered by an open world.

Cyber Space and the Future of Feminine Identity

Although *Life is What You Make It* is located in a period when the internet and social media have not been widely used in India, it is worth considering how the issues addressed in the novel apply to the development of feminine identity in modern India through the use of the cyber space. This part explores how the challenges brought up in the Shenoy novel have developed in the digital era and gives a speculation on what feminine identity will be in the world where it is becoming more connected.

The internet and social media have significantly changed the situation of forming feminine identity as compared to the era when the novel is set. The internet, has offered women

new platforms where they are able to express themselves, find others with similar mentality and defy social standards. In lots of aspects, these online worlds have intensified and speeded up such identity negotiation processes we observe in the character of Ankita.

As an example, the awareness about mental health that Shenoy is advocating using the story of Ankita has received a strong tool in the social media. Nowadays Indian women aged 18-35 share their experience with mental health problems in blogs, vlogs, and posts on social media and in such ways they build supportive communities and break the stigma in the way that Ankita had not given herself an opportunity to do when she was younger.

In the same vein, the dilemma of managing the career goals with social demands that Ankita is going through nowadays has been discussed on an enormous scale online. Social media has also provided the space on which women can share their experiences and support and advise each other and all confront oppressive gender roles.

The digital era has its own problems, and it is very problematic and serious for mental health if the ideal life is to be shown online. Nowadays, cyber bullying and online harassment have become a threat to wellbeing and self-expression of women. And the speed of the technologies that is happening around in this digital world can deepen the generational rift, as Ankita in the novel is facing.

In the future, it appears probable that cyber space will remain an important factor in the development of feminine identity in India. With the development of virtual and augmented reality technologies, new questions can be put about the nature of identity itself. What will emerge is the impact that the skill of presenting oneself in virtual worlds has on the conception of femininity. What will be the impact of the growing merging of the physical and digital world on the bargaining of tradition and modernity that we observe in the novel by Shenoy?

Although we cannot say precisely what these future developments will look like, the themes discussed in *Life is What You Make It* - the quest of a personal, the struggle of intra- and interpersonal wishes and social pressures, the way to manage mental illnesses - are likely to remain topical in emerging and changing situations.

***Life is What You Make It* in the Context of Feminist Literary Criticism**

In order to summarize our discussion, it should be noted how *Life is What You Make It* can be placed within the context of feminist literature criticism and specifically in the context of Indian literary criticism. This section focuses on the way Shenoy novel deals with feminist themes and how it fits in the current debate on female writing in India.

Some of the 20th century writers of literature, such as Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain to the contemporary writers of literature such as Arundathi Roy, literature has been used as a tool of exploration and challenge to the genre as used by the Indian women writers. In India, the history of feminist literary criticism is very rich and multifaced, and it covers a lot of different perspectives and approaches. *Life is What You Make It* can be addressed as a novel that is belonging to such tradition. It goes about the feminist theme in such a way that is a bit different from its predecessors. In contrast to the works that were much more openly political, the novel by Preeti Shenoy is centred around feminist concerns through the personal experience of the main protagonist. In this way, we can explore the way in which a bigger social challenge remains in the life of an individual, and it can be done in a subtle manner.

The portrayal of the novel of all these themes, including women education, career aspirations, mental health, and the conflict between tradition and modernity are all in line with the major issues of the feminist criticism. Nevertheless, the strategy by Shenoy is remarkable in its moderation and restraint. Instead of showing the world in black and white, the novel admits the contradictions and obscurities of feminine Indian identity in modern days.

The following passage encapsulates the feminist themes in the novel which is from the prologue:

“I realize with a sinking feeling that the patient now refers to me. I feel helpless. I feel lost. I feel angry. And in my mind I think that the whole mental health institute thing is bull shit. Hype. They talk nonsense and have no clue as to what they are doing or saying. I don't want to be here. I don't want to see any psychiatrist or

doctor. My opinion now does not matter anymore. I had my chance and I screwed it up badly. Now I have no choice except to listen to my parents and go along with whatever they suggest. So much for my attempts at being independent. So much for my attempts at being an adult.” (Shenoy, 2011, p.5)

This excerpt shows the feeling of powerlessness and frustration of the Ankita being sacked and even being compelled to obey the will of the psychiatrist and her parents even though she longed to make her own choices. It is an indication of the historical pains women experience in trying to have their voices heard and an autonomy. The anger of the Ankita and her dismissal of the entire mental health institute thing as questionable and appellations of the whole situation as bull shitting and hype implies that she is quite sceptical of the whole patriarchal system that does not recognize or validate the experiences of women. In general, this text represents the feminist message of fighting against marginalization, making a voice, and determining himself in the new world of social limitations.

This dialogue summarizes most of the feminist concerns that exist in the book - recognition of the historical struggles women have fought to achieve, the need to be self-determined, the need to belong to a greater feminist movement, and the willingness to make a positive change to the world of future generations.

Shenoy exposes feminist ideas to a large group of people by covering these themes using a personal account of Ankita. This strategy could bring feminist ideas to the audience who may not read more academic or more overtly political feminist texts.

Conclusion:

The novel *Life is What You Make It* by Preeti Shenoy provides a profound and well-rounded depiction of the concept of femininity in modern-day India. Using the character of Ankita Sharma, Shenoy explores the issues that surround the creation of a feminine identity in a fast-evolving society by touching on the issues of mental health and education, love and career goals.

The importance of the novel lies in the contribution to the development of women in Indian literature. It does not necessarily confine only to the captivated storytelling; it shows the appearance of such female protagonists that do not fix only into any normal classification. It contributes to the overall enlarged portrayal of femininity in popular Indian fiction. Here, the female protagonist struggles with real life issues. We can notice the significant changes in India through the post-liberalised Indian fiction such as *Life is What You Make It*. The novel feeds on issues like globalization and post-liberalization changes in the economy. The major factor, that is the importance of education, somehow supports the lives of women in it, thereby producing dynamic nature of Indian society and powerful changing position of women within it.

The novel is not only fixed to any limited context of its time; rather, it becomes relevant even today. In the end, we can say that *Life is What You Make It* can be regarded as a testament of the strength of its narrative. And it sheds light on multi-layered social issues and the transformation of powerful female identity in Indian culture and literature. The story of Ankita presents herself as one who becomes self-experienced in her life, and through this character, we contemplate the possibilities of how femininity can be loudly articulated in the contemporary world.

Reference

- Chakraborty, M. (2006). “Chick Lit in India: The Dawning of a New Woman?” In S. Ferriss & M. Young (Eds), *Chick Lit: The New Woman’s Fiction*.
 Gokulsing, K., & Moti, W. (2004). *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*. Trentham Books.
 Lau, L. (2009). “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals”. *Modern Asian Studies*, 43(2), 571–590.

Between Tradition and Globalization: The Evolution of Feminine Identity in Preeti Shenoy's *Life is What You Make It*

- Mishra, V. (2007). *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary*. Routledge.
- Nubile, C. (2003). *The Danger of Gender: Caste, Class and Gender in Contemporary Indian Women's Writing*. In Sarup & Sons.
- Ponzanesi, S. (2014). *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: Icons, Markets, Mythologies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rajan, R. (1993). *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*. Routledge.

Main Source:

Shenoy, Preeti. *Life Is What You Make It*. Srishti Publishers, 2011.

Bio-note

Mr. Proshanta Sarkar is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Ghatal R.S. Mahavidyalaya, Ghatal, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India.

Email Id: proshantabusarkar@gmail.com

Prof. (Dr.) Gauri Shankar Jha is a Professor in the University Department of English, Ranchi University, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India.

