



# Overtones Of Existentialism In Preeti Shenoy's Life Is What You Make It

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Existential theory is a 20th century philosophy in Europe that focusses on the individual's experience in the world and the way they understand them. It is the individual's determination and responsibility that propagates one's existence. The predominant themes of existentialism are absurdity, mortality, alienation, and the pressure on the human consciousness and freedom. The survival of one's own existence with their constant struggle is prevalent and evident in the works of PreethiShenoy. PreethiShenoy explores the psyche of youngsters and their survival struggle with determination is evident almost in all her novels. Hence an attempt is made to analyse the protagonist Ankita Sharma of PreethiShenoy's debut novel "Life is What You Make it" (2011). Ankita Sharma a jubilant student is ambitious to acquire MBA in a reputed institute and her hard work yields success to get the admission. The proposal of Abishek did not alter the mindset of Ankita but her determination is tested by the trials and tribulations caused by the sudden suicide of Abishek. Hence the existential elements in the personal life and struggle of Ankita Sharma to win back her life is the key factor of the article.

**Keywords:** PreethiShenoy, Existential elements, determination, anxiety, freedom.

**Life is what You Make It** (2011) is the first novel of PreethiShenoy. The title of the novel itself suggests the existential philosophy that the individual is responsible for their own achievement and downfall. Existential philosophy originated in the late 19th and 20th century in Europe, in particular in France and Germany. Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher known as the father of existentialism, Nietzsche and Heidegger the German philosophers, Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus the French philosophers emphasize the different aspects of existentialism but they unanimously agree on the individual's struggle in the universe that appears meaningless and absurd. Jean Paul Sartre popularised existentialism after World War Two that "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does". (21)

PreethiShenoy's novels mostly revolve around young women protagonists who are smart enough to tackle the problems with their constant courage and determination for their existence. The individuals are conscious of themselves and their surrounding threats and hence they strive hard to be truthful and they simply don't yield to societal expectations. They believe that human beings have the freedom to create their own life and find a true meaning for their existence. They firmly believe in their creation of their world through their choices and actions and they don't believe in the predetermined life. The existential philosophy of Kierkegaard's "focuses on the individual's subjective experience and the importance of personal authenticity and choice. He rejects the idea of objective, universal truth, and instead emphasized the importance of subjective truth and personal faith" (191). Hence self-efforts, determination, right choices and attitude of mind help growing up women characters of PreethiShenoy according to her vision. The protagonists neither blame God nor fate for their shortcomings.

The protagonist Ankita Sharma is a young student of Agnes College who has a passion for learning. She is also an active member of college Cultural Committee, the Art Club Secretary who plays a vital role in the club getting second prize in the Intercollegiate cultural competitions. When the participant had a throat infection and didn't turn up Ankita came to the rescue, in view of that the chairperson Sanjana Menon comments "You were not bad at all for a first timer" (25). The determination as an Arts club Secretary made her happy that they didn't lose the overall trophy of the event Symphony. In the cultural tenure Abhishek the Cultural

Secretary of Mahaveer College Kochi proposed his love towards Ankita but she expressed her desire to do MBA in Mumbai neglecting Abhishek. The teenage temperament didn't make Ankita fall in love but she was very clear in her passion for higher studies. Her hard work in the entrance examination proved her vitality and intelligence that Ankita had four Universities call-letters in hand for her selection. Abhishek had the only option at Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) and he compelled Ankita to give a promise for being his life partner. Though Ankita had a craze for Abhishek, her dream of higher studies outwitted her other thoughts. She spoke to him plainly, "Oh Abhi. I can't promise anything. I wish I could," (75) after discussing it with her friend Suvi. Existentialists like Ankita believe in their own choices and they are ready to create their own path with the choices they make. She was so persistent and well planned in her higher studies that even if her father didn't get a transfer Ankita would have flown to Mumbai. The suicide of Abhishek shatters Ankita, for which she is unknowingly responsible. The death of Abhi teaches a lot of moral philosophy to Ankita Sharma. She understands its inevitable aspect in human existence and creates anxiety in her existence. The Postmortem reports of Abhi conclude his death as drowning by high levels of alcohol consumption. Ankita wished that she would have answered his last wish of keeping in touch and Abhi's grandpa's words "Never belittle love" (78) reverberated in her mind.

The Mumbai episode had a good start with new friends and new teaching staff and Ankita enjoyed every moment that she topped in the exams scoring ninety eight for hundred. Next in the cultural of Mumbai College Joseph recommends Ankita's name for Just a minute event and she mesmerised the audience with her lovely speech. She dances with Joseph and in ecstasy reaches the parapet, the dangerous edge of the top of the tenth floor making others scream, and when a guy daringly questions her behaviour she shouts at him. Ankita's friends Joseph, Jigna, Chaya all were doubtful of Ankita's strange behaviour and the mood shift she exhibited the same day and concluded that she might have drunk. Ankita herself thinks "I had no idea myself what I had been doing. It was the first time in my life that I realised that I couldn't trust myself anymore. It was a terrifying thought." (95). The terrific change in Ankita frightened the near and dear even Ankita felt the same that she is devoured by some mental illness with the inconsistent mood shift.

The consequences were so terrific that the perfect and clean Ankita's room was untidy and her mom volunteered herself to clear the mess. To add fuel to her distressed situation the parents of Ankita found out Abhi's letter written in blood and questions her relationship with Abhi and burns the letters. The dream of getting a degree in management vanished then and she felt a void and to relieve her mental pain "curled up my fist as tightly as I could and the finger nails dug deep into the flesh of my palm. I did it again and again. The deeper my nails dug, the better I felt. Then I saw the paper cutting knife which I had bought some time back. I took it and made a small cut on the side of my wrist. I winced slightly as the blade cut the skin and a line of blood appeared. I felt better then" (119). Ankita deliberately hurts herself since she is unable to bear the mental pain whereas the physical pain comforts her. The exposure of Abhi and Vaibhav's letters and the reading of it by her parents violated the teenage Ankita. Later the anxiety attack and her sleeplessness were identified by her parents and she was treated. The treatment in Mumbai worsens her further and finally Mr and Mrs Sharma admit Ankita at the National Mental Health Institute and Dr. Madhusudhan's care and medication cure her mental illness "Bipolar Disorder".

It's Ankita who had survived after her two suicidal attempts and the soothing words of Dr. Madhusudhan has sustained the treatment and therapy in the Mental health Institute, Bangalore. The support of Ankita's parents and the hopeful words of Dr. Madhusudhan and Dr. Namita Deshmukh revive Ankita. Life sometimes diverges in a different path of what one has not planned yet; it's the courage and determination that leads the individual to reach the destination. The self-effort, determination, right choices and attitude of mind help the growing up of women characters of Preethi Shenoy according to her vision. The Epilogue says that Ankita married a man of her choice, bagged six more degrees and has a four year old child. Vaibhav married a girl of his choice and settled in the USA.

The protagonist Ankita never blames God for her frustration during the mental illness phase after which she was severely manic. But she recognises the human need for meaning and purpose of life, and she experiences the real love and care of her parents at odd times. The friend's constant support and attention of the doctor helps her find out the meaning of life and what is her life in the meaningless world. The new Ankita's spirit of individuality, strength of will power, determination, her selection of choices, her crisis management and perseverance win back her lost rewards, skills and talents and finally a life of contentment.

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