

URBANISM IMPACT ON SOCIAL STRATA: A STUDY OF PREETI SHENOY'S LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a study of urbanism's impact on contemporary Indian society. Set against the backdrop of urban India, the novel deals with the critical perspectives on the evolving individual and society, men and women, masculinity and femininity, identity crisis and the individual's aspiration in a rapidly changing urbanizing society. Shenoy unfolds that urban development decreases women's dependence on parental authority and enables them to live carefree and autonomous life choices, including selecting partners free from traditional restrictions.

This shift in the novel reveals a significant transformation in male and female relationships. Through the protagonist, Ankita's life journey, Shenoy highlights the influence of urbanity on personal and community lifestyle, social mobility, and mental well-being while also unveiling the persistence of entrenched class divisions despite the promises of modernity. The study is a clearcut investigation of societal pressure on individuals' physical, social and mental health and the pursuit of self-fulfilment. The study is also unfolded the investigation of how urbanism shapes personal and collective experiences in contemporary India. Ultimately, it highlights the tensions between traditional and modern social hierarchies within urban environments.

Keywords: Individual and social, Social mobility, Class structure, Gender relationship, Family, Identity and Materialism.

1. INTRODUCTION

India's fast urbanization has two sides: on the one hand, it offers chances for modernization, social mobility, and economic growth; on the other, it is a place of increasing inequality, social isolation, and mental anguish. Urban areas in India have become hotbeds of social stratification, fierce competition, and fractured individual identities, especially in the years following liberalization. These changes in society are reflected in literature, which offers a prism through which to examine how urbanism, identity, and social class intersect.

Written by Preeti Shenoy, *Life is What You Make it*, is a remarkable novel that studies urbanism's impact on city dwellers' social lives. Located in metropolitan cities, the novel is a wonderful tale of two metropolitan cities such as Cochin and Mumbai. It is about Ankita Sharma, who belongs to a conservative family of Cochin. In addition, the novel also focuses on her life experience in Mumbai during her studies. Set in 1980s, the novel *Life is What You Make It* unfolds the individual,

family and community life of the conservative society in which a young woman like Ankita Sharma suffers from the conservative mindset. After moving from Chennai to Mumbai to pursue her ambitions, Ankita was admitted to one of the topmost South Indian Colleges.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many scholars, critics, authors, and philosophers have always paid critical attention to city life and its influence on the social, political, and economic dimensions of residents' lives through their creative works. They often analyze various urban experiences, revealing the harsh realities and complexities of modern cities. However, numerous aspects of city life remain unexplored due to rapid contemporary world changes. Various scholars have contributed to these studies:

- Dr. Manisha Dwivedi and Sakshi Anant, in their research paper, *Thematic Study of Life Is What You Make It by Preeti Shenoy*, explore how an individual's past affects their present and reveal how unresolved issues continue to haunt them.
- Krishan Ganesh Bhosle, in *Reflection of Changing Life in Preeti Shenoy's Novel Life Is What You Make It*, examines how human life transforms over time, impacting personal, professional, social, and economic spheres.
- Sajjan Kumar's *Role and Significance of Relationships in Preeti Shenoy's Life Is What You Make It* delves into relationships as a form of social fabric vital to societal development and individual growth.

These studies emphasize the need for a deeper exploration of emerging trends and evolving challenges faced by city dwellers in contemporary Indian society.

Ankita's Struggles and Bipolar Disorder

In *Life is What You Make It*, Preeti Shenoy chronicles the life of Ankita, focusing on her love affairs, pranks, academic pursuits, and personal challenges. However, Ankita's life takes a dramatic turn when she is diagnosed with bipolar disorder. She becomes unable to control her emotions, physical exhaustion, and sleep patterns, experiencing manic episodes that prevent her from resting. During this period, she uses writing as an outlet, capturing her racing thoughts in poetry, which ranges from ordinary topics to fantasy, often written late at night, exacerbating her insomnia.

The novel highlights how Ankita's urban life becomes consumed by activities like studying and writing, neglecting essential chores such as self-care. She struggles with insomnia for weeks, a condition that Shenoy reflects in the clutter of Ankita's room, paralleling the chaos in her mind. Ankita's depression worsens, and she vividly describes the turmoil: "My room was increasingly beginning to resemble the chaos that was going on inside my mind... very much like the thoughts racing around inside my head, refusing to stop" (114).

Bipolar Disorder and Escalation

Ankita's mental health continues to deteriorate as she grapples with her bipolar disorder. Overwhelmed by an intense, irrational fear, she experiences anxiety attacks, which her parents misinterpret as stress from her demanding MBA course. They advise her to rest, but the anxiety persists, culminating in a breakdown at the bus stop. Despite her parents' hope that the situation is temporary, Ankita realizes it is far more severe than anyone anticipated. Eventually, her mental health issues become undeniable, but she struggles to communicate her distress to her family, who remain proud of her academic achievements.

Shenoy highlights the uncertainty of life and how its inevitable twists can cause people to feel hopeless. Ankita's emotional despair leads her to a dangerous moment of self-harm. After a failed suicide attempt, she is taken to a psychiatrist, Mukta Nagraj, who diagnoses her with depression and prescribes medication. This marks the beginning of Ankita's gradual recovery.

Urban Aspirations and Upward Mobility

The novel also explores Ankita's migration from a small town to a prestigious college in an urban setting, illustrating how cities offer opportunities for personal and professional growth. In contrast to her conservative upbringing, the city allows Ankita to pursue her ambitions freely. However, urbanization also brings about demographic shifts, fragmenting traditional social structures like joint families. As Ankita moves from Chennai to Mumbai, she faces emotional challenges, including a breakup with Abhi and the onset of her mental health crisis.

Throughout her journey, Ankita undergoes Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT), a crucial part of her treatment plan. Shenoy emphasizes the importance of addressing mental health issues, challenging societal stigma: "People have a stigma about it. They do not understand the severity of it. People simply cannot snap out of it; they need to be treated in order to get better" (163).

Individualism and Urban Relationships

Urban life fosters a sense of individualism, and Shenoy shows how Ankita's personal relationships change in the city. While the fast-paced, glamorous culture of the city encourages personal freedom, it also distances her from familial support systems. The transactional nature of urban relationships contrasts sharply with those in Ankita's hometown, highlighting how urban environments promote autonomy and self-discovery.

The cultural diversity of city life brings individuals from different backgrounds together, allowing them to share ideas, values, and lifestyles. This exchange enriches Ankita's life experiences, helping her adapt to new challenges.

Urbanization and Self-Discovery

Shenoy portrays the city as a catalyst for self-discovery, with Ankita's migration from a sheltered, traditional environment to urban settings in Kerala and Mumbai sparking her journey toward independence. The city encourages individualism, prompting Ankita to forge her identity, distinct from the expectations of her conservative family. However, as Ankita strives to meet academic and social expectations in the city's competitive environment, her mental health deteriorates. Shenoy illustrates how urban life's pressures force individuals to confront both internal and external challenges.

Tension Between Tradition and Modernity

Urbanization disrupts traditional family structures, widening the gap between individuals and their families. Ankita's parents, rooted in conservative values, struggle to understand her modern lifestyle and aspirations. This cultural divide is further highlighted when Ankita's parents discover her romantic relationships, sparking conflict and driving Ankita to self-harm as a form of rebellion. The city symbolizes freedom and opportunity, while her family represents restrictive, small-town ideals.

The Impact of Urban Competition on Mental Health

The novel explores the emergence of a new social hierarchy shaped by urban competition. Ankita embraces the opportunities offered by the city, rejecting traditional values in favor of the more fluid, diverse lifestyle of Mumbai. However, this competitive environment also exacerbates the divide between those who thrive and those who struggle, with Ankita's mental health challenges underscoring the darker side of urban life. Shenoy reveals how cities, while offering upward mobility, intensify social and class disparities.

Parental Influence on Well-Being

Life is What You Make It also addresses the complexities of the parent-child relationship.

Shenoy emphasizes the importance of a supportive family environment for mental well-being.

Ankita's conservative parents fail to understand her struggles, contributing to her emotional distress. The novel suggests that balanced parenting—combining support and boundaries—is crucial for a child's emotional development.

The Power of Pursuing Passion

Ankita's realization that her true calling lies in Creative Writing, rather than an MBA, brings her a sense of fulfillment. Shenoy illustrates how pursuing one's passion can help individuals overcome challenges and step outside their comfort zones. Ankita's newfound purpose enables her to reengage with the world and face her mental health struggles head-on.

Navigating Urban Life

Through Ankita's journey, Shenoy explores the complexities of urban life, individualism, mental health, and the impact of family dynamics. *Life is What You Make It* emphasizes the importance of self-discovery, resilience, and pursuing one's true passion amidst the challenges of city life. The novel underscores the profound influence of both urban environments and familial relationships on an individual's well-being.

3. CONCLUSION

Life Is What You Make by Preeti Shenoy is a microcosm of the larger social shifts brought about by India's urbanization. The book examines the intricacies of identity development, mental health, and social stratification in modern urban settings via Ankita Sharma's personal hardships. In addition to offering chances for social mobility, urbanism may also be a source of psychological discomfort by escalating social inequality and fostering new kinds of alienation, as Shenoy's story demonstrates. Ultimately, *Life Is What You Make It* provides valuable insights into how urbanism

shapes social dynamics and individual destinies. It emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of city life's psychological and social ramifications, advocating for a balanced approach to urban development that considers individuals' aspirations and well-being. Shenoy's work serves as a poignant reminder of the impact of urbanization on human lives and the importance of addressing its challenges in contemporary society.

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