

Beyond the Facade: Unmasking the True Self in the Modern Society

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Abstract- The complex dynamics of identity and self-discovery in Preeti Shenoy's novels *Life is What You Make It*, *Wake Up Life is Calling*, and *Rule Breakers* are examined in the research paper, "Beyond the Facade: Unmasking the True Self in Modern Society." These pieces explore the difficulties people women in particular face when trying to strike a balance between their desire for authenticity and social expectations. Shenoy illustrates via her gripping stories how people are frequently forced to hide who they really are due to social constraints, which causes internal conflict and identity crises. Ankita's path from struggling with mental health difficulties to accepting who she really is in *Life is What You Make It* serves as a reminder of the bravery required to face social stigma. This story of resiliency is continued in the sequel *Wake Up Life is Calling*, which examines how Ankita rebuilds her life and rediscovers her passion in spite of social criticism. *Rule Breakers* turns its attention to Veda, a young lady from a traditional family who forges an own identity by rejecting social hypocrisy and gender expectations. This study highlights Shenoy's investigation of the resiliency of the human spirit while critically analyzing the issues of empowerment, societal opposition, and mental health.

Keywords: Identity, self-discovery, societal-expectations, Mental health.

The quest for originality frequently collides with social norms in today's quickly changing world, resulting in a gripping story of internal struggle and metamorphosis. The conflict between following social conventions and being true to oneself has frequently appeared in literature, providing readers with a chance to consider their own challenges with self-expression, identity, and personal development. One of India's most renowned modern writers, Preeti Shenoy, explores these subjects in great detail in her books *Rule Breakers*, *Wake Up Life*

is Calling, and *Life is What You Make It*. Because they tackle the common problem of revealing oneself in the face of social constraints, her writings speak to readers of all ages.

The article examines the concept of revealing one's actual self throughout Shenoy's books, emphasizing the protagonists' struggles as they deal with social expectations and prejudices while navigating difficult emotional terrain. Margaret Waters in her book "Feminism: A very short Introduction" said that: For a married woman, her home becomes a prison- house. The house itself, as well as everything, belongs to the husband and of all fixtures the most object is his breeding machine, the wife, Married women are in fact slaves, their situation no better than that of Negroes in the West Indies. Readers are introduced to Ankita in *Life is What You Make It*, whose seemingly ideal life starts to fall apart and forces her to face her mental health and social criticism. *Wake Up Life is Calling*, its follow-up, carries on Ankita's tale of tenacity as she pursues recovery and self-acceptance. Shenoy tells the tale of Veda in *Rule Breakers*, a small-town woman who redefines her identity and goals by defying social hypocrisy and gender standards.

This study looks at how Shenoy depicts her characters' efforts to balance their inner needs with their societal obligations through a sociocultural and psychological lens, emphasizing the bravery and resiliency needed to reveal their actual selves. Shenoy's novels provide a powerful critique of the flimsy façades of contemporary society while encouraging readers to embrace authenticity by delving into topics like gender roles, mental health, and empowerment.

The article makes the case that Shenoy's writings offer more than only accounts of personal growth; they also act as a mirror reflecting the difficulties and inconsistencies of modern Indian society. Priya Singh says as "Shenoy's novels, particularly *Life is What You Make It* and *Wake Up Life is Calling*, illustrate how modern women wrestle with the dual forces of external expectations and internal desires. The unmasking of the true self is not merely a personal journey, but a social act of resistance against patriarchal norms." Her depiction of contemporary people, especially women, emphasizes the value of fortitude and self-discovery in a society that is frequently dominated by outward looks and strict norms. Shenoy's stories are highly relevant in today's world because she encourages readers to consider their own journeys of discovering who they really are.

Life is What You Make It by Preeti Shenoy revolves around Ankita's battle with mental health while preserving the appearance of a flawless existence. "There is nothing worse than being trapped in your mind, in a web of despair where every door you try leads to darkness" (*LIWYMI* 89). At first look, Ankita seems to have it all: a successful academic career, a lively social life, and a promising future. Beneath this seemingly perfect appearance, though, is a young woman who is incredibly fragile and battling internal conflict. The pressure to live up to social norms, which frequently place an emphasis on appearances above sincerity and emotional health, is reflected in her journey.

Ankita conceals her difficulties and represses her emotions in an effort to satisfy the expectations of her friends, family, and society. This leads to a risky discrepancy between her inner reality and the persona she presents to the outside world. She is diagnosed with bipolar disorder as a result of her ongoing urge to preserve perfection, which ultimately causes a mental health catastrophe. Shenoy sensitively captures Ankita's spiral into despair while drawing attention to the stigma associated with mental health conditions and the isolation they cause.

Ankita's final awareness that genuine healing necessitates revealing oneself and accepting her

vulnerability is depicted in the book. She starts to reconstruct her life on her own and escape social criticism through therapy and introspection. "There is nothing worse than being trapped in your mind, in a web of despair where every door you try leads to darkness" (*LIWYMI* 89). In addition to highlighting the significance of mental health awareness, Ankita's tale highlights the bravery required to face one's difficulties and seek assistance. Readers are empowered by her path, which inspires them to put their mental health above social appearances.

A recurrent topic in Preeti Shenoy's works, especially in *Life is What You Make It* and *Wake Up Life is Calling*, is how society and family shape and skew one's image of oneself. Shubhi Verma says as "The psychological resilience portrayed in *Life is What You Make It* offers an essential framework for understanding how mental illness can act as a catalyst for profound identity transformation, challenging conventional societal notions of success." In these books, Ankita's journey eloquently demonstrates how social conventions and family expectations can both help and impede a person's realization of who they really are.

Ankita is raised in a traditional, middle-class Indian household that values academic success and upholding a spotless social image. Although they provide her with traditional care, her parents don't understand or acknowledge her emotional difficulties since they place more importance on outward appearances than on inner health. Even though Ankita struggles with mental health issues, she puts on a mask of invulnerability because she feels pressured to live up to society's expectations of perfection. Ankita is further isolated by the family's unwillingness to discuss mental health in public, which perpetuates the shame associated with emotional fragility.

In a similar vein, Ankita's view of herself is greatly distorted by social expectations. She internalizes the idea that achievement and perfection are necessary for acceptance, which makes her minimize her difficulties and concentrate only on fulfilling expectations from others. Her emotions of humiliation and alienation are heightened by the social criticism she receives after receiving a bipolar disorder

diagnosis, which furthers her self-doubt and dejection.

But Ankita's path also shows how people can grow and discover themselves when they question the roles that society and their families have placed on them. She eventually learns to accept her uniqueness and vulnerabilities after starting to dismantle the strict expectations that once characterized her through therapy and self-examination. Ankita regains her identity by unlearning social conditioning, underscoring the fortitude needed to negotiate the intricate relationship between self-perception and cultural impact.

Shenoy's examination of the family and society highlights the contradictory nature of these forces they can offer structure and support, but they can also reinforce harmful stigmas and stereotypes. Ankita's tale is a potent reminder of the need of fostering an atmosphere that encourages candid communication and acceptance so that people can appreciate and find their authentic self without worrying about criticism.

A major plot point in Preeti Shenoy's books *Life is What You Make It* and *Wake Up Life is Calling* is Ankita's quest to rediscover her passion and resist social criticism. Ankita has to deal with the outward barriers of social expectations and judgment in addition to the internal difficulties of maintaining her mental health since receiving a bipolar disorder diagnosis. Her battle to recover her uniqueness and enthusiasm serves as a reminder of the bravery needed to confront social preconceptions and stereotypes. Sharma.S comments that "In *Wake Up, Life is Calling*, Shenoy explores the transformative power of self-realization and personal growth, encouraging readers to embrace life's challenges with hope and determination"(45-47).

Ankita is initially shown as a successful, driven young lady who is passionate about creation and the arts. Nevertheless, she is compelled to put aside her own interests in order to live up to social pressure and achieve academic success. Her mental health issues are made worse by this disconnection between her inner wants and her

external existence, which leaves her feeling deeply unfulfilled.

Ankita sets out on a path of self-discovery after her breakdown and subsequent rehabilitation. Overcoming the stigma attached to her mental health diagnosis is one of her biggest obstacles. She is isolated by society's perception of her illness, which is one of distrust and sympathy rather than empathy. Nevertheless, Ankita starts to face these prejudices and refuses to let society's opinions dictate who she is.

For Ankita, rediscovering her love of painting is a life-changing event. She finds comfort and a fresh sense of purpose as she re-engages with her artistic side. Art becomes into a tool for healing and restoring her self-esteem in addition to being a way for her to express herself. She gains the ability to put her goals and happiness ahead of social acceptance as a result of this process.

The perseverance needed to defy social norms and embrace one's actual self is demonstrated by Ankita's path. She challenges the expectations placed on her and rewrites her story by recovering her passion and facing criticism. By highlighting the value of following one's aspirations and rejecting the constricting labels society frequently places on people, Preeti Shenoy uses Ankita's story to motivate readers. Ankita's victory over social criticism is a potent reminder of the importance of accepting oneself and the bravery required to live one's true self.

Preeti Shenoy examines the difficulties people encounter in escaping socially prescribed positions in *Wake Up Life is Calling*. Ankita's journey is a potent illustration of resilience and self-determination. The book explores the hardships faced by those who don't want to fit in with strict expectations, emphasizing the bravery required to forge an authentic identity in the face of outside pressure.

Refusing to let her prior mental health issues define her is Ankita's most notable act of resistance. "Hope is the light that guides you out of the tunnel, and healing is the journey you take one step at a time"(WPLIC 143). She experiences severe social criticism after receiving a bipolar disorder diagnosis, as people

view her more as a person with goals and aspirations than as someone with a disease. Nevertheless, Ankita actively resists this stigma by concentrating on her rehabilitation and reinventing her future according to her wishes. Instead of being labeled as "mentally unstable" by society's biases, she decides to go on, embraces therapy, and acquires coping skills.

Academic and professional achievement are frequently seen through a limited prism in Indian society, where fixed career pathways lead to so-called "respectable" occupations. Ankita, who was once encouraged to pursue traditional academic achievement, rediscovers her passion for painting after finding that it fulfills her. She displays her individuality and demonstrates that passion and well-being are more important than outside recognition by defying social standards that limit employment choices.

Women's behavior is frequently dictated by traditional gender roles, which call for sacrifice, obedience, and adherence to social and familial norms. By prioritizing her independence over social acceptance, Ankita defies these constraints. She disproves the idea that women should always put social acceptance ahead of their own happiness by proving that achieving one's own goals and self-fulfillment is just as significant as following social norms.

Along the way, Ankita undergoes a metamorphosis and discovers that her value is not based on approval from others. She actively creates her own identity rather than fitting into the roles that are thrust upon her, such as "obedient" daughter, "perfect" student, or "victim" of mental illness. She learns via self-discovery that genuine success is based on accepting oneself and being able to live a genuine life.

Preeti Shenoy offers a compelling story of defiance against social expectations and predetermined roles in *Wake Up Life is Calling*. Those who are fighting to escape the constraints placed upon them can find encouragement in Ankita's path. Ankita not only regains her identity but also confronts the inflexible social systems via tenacity, self-discovery, and the pursuit of passion, demonstrating that genuine

fulfillment results from accepting one's actual self.

Veda, the strong-willed heroine of *Rule Breakers* by Preeti Shenoy, defies the strict social conventions that are placed upon her in a traditional environment. Her path is one of empowerment, self-discovery, and rebellion as she defies patriarchal, traditional, and familial norms. The struggle of many young women who want to escape the roles that have been assigned to them and forge their own identities is highlighted by Veda's resistance.

Veda is expected to prioritize marriage over school and job goals, following the traditional route set for women in orthodox Indian society. Simone de Beauvoir about marriage said: The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Even today, most women are, were, or plan to be married, or they suffer from not being so. Marriage is the reference by which the single women are defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution. She pursues her goals both personally and professionally, nevertheless, and refuses to live up to their expectations. Her defiance embodies the tacit disobedience of numerous young ladies who reject the influence of social conventions on their destiny.

Taking charge of her life choices is one of the most important ways Veda defies social expectations. She doesn't let other people to control her decisions about her relationships, employment, or education. Veda's boldness turns into a potent act of disobedience in a society where women are frequently expected to be meek and submissive. Shreya Sen says that "The story of Veda in *Rule Breakers* is a powerful testament to the woman who chooses to break the chains of tradition and carve her own path. In doing so, she not only transforms her own life but the lives of those around her"(48).

Like many families in conservative cultures, Veda's family puts a lot of pressure on her to uphold traditional ideals. Neelam Kumar criticizes that "Shenoy's characters are often caught between the traditional constraints of Indian culture and the allure of personal freedom. In *Wake Up Life is Calling*, the protagonist's quest for self-realization is an act

of rebellion against her past."She is criticized for wanting to live her life as she sees fit, but she will not be bound by antiquated ideas. Her experience serves as a reflection of the psychological and emotional challenges associated with defying firmly rooted social norms.

Rather than basing her value on what society considers success marriage, family honor, and social acceptance Veda forges her own route. She demonstrates that a woman can succeed by embracing her uniqueness and following her passions rather than by fitting in with society's expectations.

The spirit of contemporary women who defy social norms and conventional gender roles is embodied by Veda's defiance in *Rule Breakers*. Preeti Shenoy's narrative shows the challenges of defying conventional conventions and the bravery required to accept oneself as one is. Veda's journey is inspirational because it demonstrates that overcoming obstacles and leading a genuine life are the keys to true empowerment.

In conservative environments, such as Veda, women are supposed to put marriage, family honor, and traditional values ahead of their own development and aspirations. These demands produce a façade of "ideal womanhood," in which a woman's value is determined by her conformity and obedience rather than her uniqueness. Like many women, Veda battles these forces as she tries to forge her own identity.

In order to escape criticism, societal façades frequently demand that women should repress their own inclinations. At first, Veda, who has aspirations that transcend social boundaries, is confined to a life that is prescribed by others. Her battle serves as a metaphor for the secret struggles that many women endure when they are compelled to give up their goals in order to gain social acceptance.

Women who question social norms frequently encounter hostility and condemnation. Veda is criticized in *Rule Breakers* for her unorthodox decisions, demonstrating how firmly held ideas prevent women from claiming their uniqueness. The dread of being called "disobedient" or

"rebellious" becomes a major obstacle to expressing oneself. Veda's path is one of empowerment thru resistance in spite of these obstacles. She changes from a lady bound by social norms to a feminist businesswoman who takes charge of her own life.

If I had dared break the 'rule', I would have probably been rewarded. But most women are so afraid to break out of the mould of societal acceptance. We have been taught to be obedient, sweet and kind. The thing is, breaking rules comes with a price. The reward for breaking the rules is not certain. Hence, most of us find it easier to not break rules and be 'good girls'. (*Rule Breakers*, 193)

Veda defies patriarchal conventions by choosing to forge her own identity and transcend conventional roles. She understands that overcoming imposed restrictions and having the courage to dream outside of social norms are the keys to empowerment.

Veda gains the confidence to define success according to her own standards as she embraces entrepreneurship. She creates a life that fits her goals rather than following the traditional belief that a woman's greatest accomplishment is marriage and a family. Her experience is representative of the expanding feminist movement, which pushes women to pursue happiness outside of social norms.

Veda's metamorphosis represents the larger fight for female equality in addition to being personal. She encourages other women to confront preconceptions and boldly follow their goals by escaping social façades and succeeding as an entrepreneur.

The novels *Wake Up*, *Life is Calling*, *Life is What You Make It*, and *Rule Breakers* by Preeti Shenoy provide deep insights into the intricacies of identity, self-discovery, and social expectations. Shenoy illustrates the conflict between outward appearances and interior realities by following the adventures of Ankita and Veda, who struggle with mental health, personal goals, and the pressures of social conventions.

Life is what you make of it, so wake up and answer the call. Ankita's battle with bipolar disorder and the stigma associated with mental

health are evidence of the value of perseverance and self-acceptance. "Life is truly what you make it. It is all about the choices you make and the chances you take"(LIWYMI 12). Her metamorphosis is portrayed in a way that questions society's need for perfection and encourages readers to accept their flaws rather than hide them. By concentrating on gender roles and cultural indoctrination, especially through Veda's defiance of orthodox standards, *Rule Breakers* expands on this issue. Her rejection of conventional norms emphasizes how important it is to shatter social façades in order to pave one's own way.

Shenoy critiques the pressures of contemporary society, such as marriage, professional aspirations, stigma around mental health, and gender norms, through the use of strong female heroines in all of these books. The adventures of the protagonists highlight the need for bravery, introspection, and a readiness to question social norms in order to reveal one's actual self. Shenoy conveys a strong message by combining emotional depth with approachable storytelling: accepting one's genuine self despite social opposition is the path to true emancipation.

Shenoy's stories are still relevant today because they promote resilience and self-awareness in the face of changing societal norms and digital identities. Her writings encourage readers to challenge the façades that have been placed on them and to support both individual and group empowerment. This study not only clarifies the complexities of identity in contemporary culture, but it also reaffirms the age-old importance of authenticity in overcoming obstacles in life.

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