

Literature as Therapy: How Life is What You Make It Sheds Light on Bipolar Disorder

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Abstract

Life is filled with unavoidable ups and downs that can either add beauty to our journey or bring challenges to overcome. Facing life with determination allows individuals to overcome obstacles effectively. Preeti Shenoy's Life is What You Make It vividly portrays the transformative journey of rediscovering herself with hope. Psychologists view Bipolar disorder as a manageable condition with the right support, encouraging individuals to focus on strategies for leading fulfilling lives. Hope is a powerful emotional state that inspires individuals to pursue goals, make decisions, and overcome challenges. In the novel, Ankita successfully conquers bipolar disorder through the power of hope. Life is What you Make it, tells the story from the asylum to which she is admitted for treatment for mental illness. Preeti Shenoy's takes the reader back to her college days, love, its failure, her dream and its disaster. The story comes to the present when Ankita is taken to NHMI for consultation. It brings forth the journey of the protagonist focusing particularly on widespread problem about Bipolar disorder. Moreover, the narration ends with her recovery from Bipolar disorder. The story highlights the belief of the author that although life as it has been destined yet it is the hope of the individual through which she can manipulate his own destiny. Mental health is a taboo subject all around the world, more so in India this was explored beautifully by the author. People were not aware about it and its severity. The author has done a great work in making this novel as awareness about mental illness. Through this fictional narration the author intends to prove that people with bipolar disorder can even face a life with positivity and they can lead a complete life with strong determination and spirit.

Life is what you make it focuses attention on a little known disease termed as Bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder is associated with episodes of mood swings ranging from depressive lows to manic highs. Bipolar disorder is a mental illness that can impact anyone, but through the protagonist, Ankita's, readers understand that hope which provides support in any situation, even when life seems to unravel.

Bipolar disorder is categorized into three types of episodes: manic, hypomanic, and depressive. Symptoms of manic episodes include increased energy, heightened creativity, unrealistic thinking, extreme distractibility, and minimal sleep while remaining highly energetic. The symptoms of major depressive episodes are extreme sadness, feeling hopelessness, insomnia, and inability to enjoy activities that gave pleasure in the past and being irritable. The symptoms of hypomanic episodes are a less severe version of mania and being in an unusual mood. Hypomania is followed by mania

or major depressive episodes. This disorder ranges from extremes in energy to deep despair. The symptoms are severe and it is usually hard to diagnose, as it is not easy to spot when it starts. Treatment options for bipolar disorder include medication, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), and psychotherapy.

The story highlights the journey of recovering from a mental illness and emphasizes the importance of seeking medical help. The protagonist's intense emotions, profound memories, and tragic experiences contribute to her mental health struggles. It also conveys valuable lessons about life, resilience, and the power of hope in overcoming challenges. This deeply moving and inspiring narrative showcases the strength of faith, determination, and an indomitable spirit in conquering even the toughest challenges that life presents.

In an interview, Preeti Shenoy explains why she chose bipolar disorder as the focus of her novel. – “Bipolar Disorder is slowly gaining awareness in India but continues to be treated as somewhat of a taboo topic in most households. The book is based on a true story and when I first heard the story, it moved me so much that I decided it had to be written and shared with the world.”

Ankita mental trauma begins when Abhishek commits suicide, as she prefers doing M.B.A. to marrying Abhishek. This leads to a mental breakdown, and she even attempts suicide. Distressed by her actions, her parents, overwhelmed with worry, take her to various hospitals in the hope of helping her recover. From where the story takes another turn, but when there is a problem there is a solution too.

People with bipolar disorder often engage in risky behaviours. After her parents destroyed her hidden letters, Ankita struggled with unbearable emotional pain, leading her to self-harm as an attempt to cope with her depression. During her illness, she experienced unpredictable bursts of energy at times and extreme weakness at others, making it difficult to perform even basic tasks. Fortunately, she was admitted to NHMI in Bangalore, where she received compassionate care from Dr. Madhusudan. He diagnosed her with bipolar disorder and provided effective guidance and support, helping her to overcome the condition.

During the psychotherapy sessions, Dr. Madhusudan encourages Ankita to nurture her exceptional writing skills. He also reassures her of her bravery, earning her complete trust in his guidance. This highlights her passion and energy for her studies, which is, in fact, a symptom of mania. Due to her mental depression, the doctor prescribed medications for Ankita. Despite the challenges, the psychotherapy sessions, or talk therapy, proved highly effective during her treatment. Ankita found comfort in the companionship of Dr. Madhusudan and Dr. Namita, who helped her regain self-confidence through psychotherapy. She shared her deep pain and emotions after coming to terms with the reality of undergoing Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT).

The doctor compassionately explained to Ankita that she was experiencing a unique state of mind often associated with sensitive and talented individuals. This perspective offered her an alternative view she had never considered. Dr. Madhusudan also highlighted her exceptional talent for writing and praised her remarkable paintings. His reassuring words helped ease her anxiety to some extent.

A life chart with proper planning was given to Ankita during her stay in the occupational therapy wing. It could cover her daily routine including her wake up time, personal grooming, exercise, breakfast, doctor rounds, recreation, lunch, leisure, outdoor sports, psychotherapy, yoga, dinner and bedtime. She likes her life chart and felt happy to have something to do finally.

At the outset, Ankita felt extremely energetic and used to sleep very less. She felt like a whole new flap was opened to explore numerous things. She has a vibrant energy towards her MBA course. She decoded everything using different colour pens and developed a great enthusiasm towards studies as a result she spent so many nights as sleepless with vigorous interest towards

studies. After 15 years, Ankita recovered herself with six more academic degrees and a beautiful marriage and also now she is working as a therapist.

Ankita reflected as an extravagant self-esteem person. She developed a great interest towards jogging and as a consequence she has proven to jog great distances without going out of breath. Ankita was so energetic like charged up. Her friends notified her and asked her if she takes any drugs to run fast. Her energy showed that her manic depression initiated. It was her first experience of Bipolar disorder.

She finds hope again and starts to view life more optimistically. Ankita starts a fresh chapter in her life after experiencing severe bipolar disorder and even attempting suicide. She sheds new light on the relationship between outward events and inward pain. Ankita's bipolar disorder struggles and her quest for hope to start again have been expertly shown by Shenoy.

After the treatment in the hands of doctors, Ankita could manage her mental health and established remarkable progress with her strong will power and determination. She could bounce back to a new normal and emerge as the master of her fate.

Ankita was inspired by Dr. Madhusudan's personal experience. His sister's suicide inspired him to pursue a career in psychiatry and assist others in overcoming mental health issues. Life is a gift, he has reminded her. Ankita's lifeline was preceded by Dr. Madhusudan at the infirmary. She claimed that the difference was caused by the fact that he genuinely cared. Even though it's so amazing, love and words can heal. He consequently played the role of the ideal physician. She controlled her lifestyle and had frequent rounds of counseling from the doctor and his colleagues over the period of six months. She also made friends with a few co-patients and formed a relationship with them based on empathy, support, companionship, and mutual trust.

The treatment given by Dr. Madhusudan educated her mind how to be confident towards the sickness, which was terribly handled by the society as a humiliation. Ankita regained her spirit and sense of renewal after being discharged. Her time at NHMI provided her with invaluable life experiences and lessons. The confidence that even a premier business school could not instill was fostered during her treatment at NHMI. While she once believed that pursuing an MBA would lead to a fulfilling career, her time at the institute opened her eyes to the vast opportunities available in creative writing courses. She realized that life lessons can come from anywhere, not just through academic degrees. Although NHMI was not an educational institution, it became a place where Ankita learned some of life's most profound lessons.

References

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