

# Negotiating Identity Between Tradition And Modernity A Thematic Reading Of *Life Is What You Make It* By Preeti Shenoy

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**Abstract:** The word Tradition means that the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation which have been invented on purpose whether that is political or cultural, over short period of time. The antonym for tradition is the modernity, which means to pretend to a current or recent time and style. It refers to the contemporary society and not the ancients. Indian society is totally bound together with tradition and modernity. These are not separable, yet mostly it is tradition that rules out modernity in Indian families and tradition. Modernity is an economic force while tradition is fundamentally cultural and social customs. *Life is What You Make It* by Preeti Shenoy is a novel that delves into the life of protagonist Ankita Sharma as she navigates the complexities of tradition and modernity. The story is set in India and follows Ankita's journey from her college days to adulthood, highlighting the clash between societal expectations and individual aspirations.

**Keywords:** Identity, Tradition, Modernity, Female Aspiration, Society

Ankita is a young and ambitious woman, faces pressure from her family to conform to traditional norms and expectations. However, she yearns to break free from these constraints and pursue her own dreams and desires. As she navigates relationships, career choices, and personal struggles, Ankita grapples with the tension between tradition and modernity. She is totally ruled out by her parents who blindly follow tradition in their life. Ankita describes her parents as "Conservative strict Indian parents not permitted to invite boys' home or to visit any boy's house" (Shenoy 3).

In Ankita's life she was trapped in the web of tradition. Ankita wanted to lead a modern life like a new woman, she always wonders at things that deals with modern deeds. "I had always wondered how my first kiss would be, what one should do – should one open the mouth, close one's eyes" (Shenoy 61). Kissing lip to lip is a western culture but Ankita though being an Indian girl longs to have such a romantic feel in her life.

She seeks her individuality by choosing the cause of her own. She says "I desperately wanted to get admission into an MBA course" (Shenoy 65). Though she chooses the career of her own, her traditional parents never allow her to find her own identity because they too followed her to Bombay. She is always guided by her parents that eventually lead her not to find out her identity in the vast busy town like Bombay. Ankita's parents are very happy when they hear that Ankita selected to her MBA degree in Bombay. She says, "My parent's joy knew now bounds, as they boasted to all our relatives about my achievement" (Shenoy 67). Ankita family members joyfully enjoyed Ankita's selection and they speak all about to her relatives.

She loses herself and her passion because of tradition. They are so conservative they did not even use the word love. Their family was so strict thus Ankita not able to speak freely with her parents this made her to fall in stress. Indian parents bring self-respect by tradition but Ankita is different from normal people life she was a girl of freedom and free minded she want to select her life partner and she want to live her life by her wish. On seeing her parents face she was so afraid because of their tradition rules.

One look at my parent's face and I knew something was wrong. My dad's face was a black as storm clouds. My mother was glaring at me angrily, her eyes glowering with rage. I was quite sure that they were angry because I had procrastinated cleaning my room endlessly that they had been forced to do it. I was getting ready to apologize. (Shenoy 114)

In Ankita's family tradition "Getting a letter like this from a guy and then shamelessly holding on to it, was the ultimate sin a well brought up Indian girl could commit, in their books" (Shenoy 114). Ankita life she was ill treated by the parents because of the letter written by Abhishek. It was love letter which was caught by her parents. Ankita's struggle to break free from these constraints that reflects the tension between tradition and modernity within the narrative.

Ankita's struggle to balance traditional values with modern aspirations, highlighting the challenges many individuals face in navigating societal expectations and personal desires. Through Ankita's life, the novel offers insight into the complexities of identity, cultural heritage, and personal fulfilment in a rapidly changing world. Ankita's family was so conservative so she says,

How could I explain a thing like love to them? Their middle-class values, their proper Indian upbringing and everything they stood for, had no place for trivialities like live and romance. If it happened, you pretended it didn't. You brushed it aside and move on, as life was hard. You studied, you get a job and you got married to the person your parents chose for you. That is what they expected and that is what their way of life was. (Shenoy 116)

The expectations placed on individuals by Indian tradition, particularly regarding career choices, relationships and societal roles. The novel portrays the pressure faced by young people like Ankita to conform to traditional norms, such as pursuing a stable career, adhering to family expectations and prioritizing marriage over personal goals, Shenoy explores how these expectations can both shape and hinder individual's paths in life, ultimately challenging readers to reflect on the balance between tradition and personal fulfilment. The life was too tricky in Indian tradition of coming out of modernity it means that a girl's life should be shaped by society.

Ankita says about her parents' mentality on seeing the letter. Her father called her over, stating that there was something they needed to do. She was too tired to argue or question their intentions, so she followed her parents to the kitchen balcony. In the corner stood a bottle of kerosene along with household cleaning liquids. Her mother usually added a capful of it to the water used by the maid for mopping, which gave the floor a shine. However, this was not her father's intention when he picked up the bottle. She was too dazed to comprehend his actions. Soon, he poured some of it and burned the letter he had taken from the file (Shenoy 118). The incident led her to mental health illness. If she had modern parents they would be handle it in different way. A tradition Indian parents normally does it to their children without children's personal feeling. Ankita's father advised,

"There if only one thing to do now", say my dad. "I want you to promise me that you will stop all this nonsense. Fortunately, we are far way from Kerala. Nobody should come to know this. If they know our family name is gone. We are your parents. We have to think of your future. (Shenoy 115)

Ankita wondered how she could make her parents understand her situation. She questioned whether they would recognize that she had changed and grown, and whether they could ever relate to what she had experienced. She also felt a sense of guilt and empathy toward her parents, realizing that they had witnessed her struggles. At the same time, she acknowledged that the experience had ultimately made them stronger ads a family. Her parents had become more open toward her friends, possibly recognizing the significant role they had played in her life. However, this understanding remained unspoken, though mutually acknowledged. (Shenoy 200).

The novel intricately explores the challenges faced by young women in Indian society as they strive to balance tradition with the pursuit of independence and fulfilment. Through Ankita's experiences, the author sheds light on issues such as gender roles, familial obligations, and societal pressures. Despite facing numerous obstacles and setbacks, Ankita remains resilient and determined to carve out her own path in life. Along the way, she learns valuable lessons about self-discovery, resilience, and the important of staying true to oneself. Overall, *Life is What You Make It* is a thought-provoking and emotionally resonant novel that offers a compelling portrayal of the complexities of tradition and modernity in contemporary India. It is a story of empowerment, courage and the pursuit of happiness in the face of adversity.

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