

Adolescent Turmoil and Psychological Resilience: A Reading of Preeti Shenoy's *It Happens for a Reason*

Priya Dharshini M.

PG and Research Department of English, St. Mary's College (Autonomous), Thoothukudi
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India.

Abstract

Preeti Shenoy's novel *It Happens for a Reason* presents a poignant exploration of adolescent turmoil and psychological trauma. The protagonist's journey is marked by self-discovery, relationships, and the struggle to cope with past traumas. As she navigates the challenges of growing up, the novel sheds light on the interconnectedness of trauma, identity, and mental health. The novel masterfully weaves together themes of adolescent turmoil, psychological trauma, and resilience, creating a narrative that is both thought-provoking and emotionally resonant. Through its portrayal of the protagonist's struggles and triumphs, the novel provides a nuanced exploration of the human experience. The novel's examination of adolescent turmoil and psychological trauma raises important questions about the impact of traumatic experiences on mental health, relationships, and identity formation. The proposed research paper explores these complex issues and projects the challenges of growing up in such constrained environment in the light of the Freudian Psychoanalytic theory.

Keywords: Adolescent turmoil, Psychological trauma, Resilience, Formation, Mental health.

Psychoanalytic theory is the theory of personality organisation and the dynamics of personality development that guides psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology. The relation between psychology and physiology is very close, so much so that the recent advances in psychology may be ultimately traced to physiology. The first great triumph of physiological psychology is the application of the principle of reflex action to all activity, including that which is voluntary. Mental states do not exist by themselves. They have no stability and permanence which pertains to the objects of physiological investigations.

In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud formulates the theory of bi-cameral mind, that is the unconscious mind and the conscious mind as follows:

“The duality of human mind is based on the pleasure principle and

the reality Principle. A man seeks pleasure from his activities. In human life, there is a conflict between his pleasures, personal desires and social sanctions. He asserts that dreams can be analysed, decomposed and deciphered, in the same way literary works can also be analysed” (598).

The human mind operates on the pleasure and reality principles, creating a conflict between personal desires and social norms and both dreams and literary works can be analysed in a similar way. The modern theory of psychoanalysis used in literature has two accepted meanings. Firstly, it means a method of treating mentally disordered people. Secondly, it also goes to mean the theories on human mind and its various complexities. Many untold psychological issues are faced by youngsters, such as trauma, depression and repression.

Sigmund Freud in his Psychoanalytical theory explains three modes of thought process – ‘id’, ‘ego’, and ‘superego’. Id acts fully under the control of unconscious mind; ego acts under the control of conscious mind; and superego is under the control of conscience. Id is pleasure-oriented and hence it never bothers about the comments of the external world and cultural heritage of persons. Whereas, superego concerns about morality, culture, heritage, laws, and ethics of the state. The ego is conscious mind which compromises both id and superego and directs to take a socially acceptable act. The interference of the id, the ego and the superego in decision-making is inevitable and it occurs invariably in all walks of life irrespective of time and context.

This research paper purports to analyse the psychological thought process of Freud applied to the characters in Preeti Shenoy’s *It Happens for a Reason*. The protagonist Vipasha is highly driven by the id mode. She falls in love with Ankush in her teen age. Their love is merely pleasure oriented. They had no idea about their future when they were in love. Their relationship ended up in pregnancy. Vee excelled in her modelling career. She had been praised for her voluptuous beauty. Ankush and Vee’s parents were not ready to face the society with the baby. They left her alone to face the hardships that are ought to be faced in this social world. Without any expectation, Vee had stood firm in her decision to have her baby. This shows her unconscious decision that makes her suffer the consequences of the same.

In *It Happens for a Reason*, superego mode is highly active in the mind of Vee’s mother. Vee’s mother shows a distant affection towards Vee. During the time

of modelling, Vee's mother expressed her pride with regard to her daughter. But, when she is out with the report of pregnancy, her mother automatically isolates her to serve her dignity. Even, Vee's father tries hard to help his daughter face the world with a courageous heart but her mother is totally away from these efforts. It is due to her concern about morality, culture and ethics.

Vee as a mother, she sticks to some moral values in her parenting. She avoids other proposals of marriage for the welfare of her son, Aryan. Her motherhood reflects the other mode of thought process in her. Her stern decision is to live for her child and take him to a better position. Though she has experienced a flutter of excitement when she discovered her pregnancy, she had felt heart-wrenched when her son made efforts to search his father. The act of ego, the role of conscious mind easily manages the other two thoughts. The way Vee handles her son as a 'new woman' and a 'single mother' is portrayed in a peculiar way.

The adolescent period is a notable part of every human being. The word adolescence comes from the Latin verb 'adolescere' which means 'to grow'. This period represents the intensive growth and changes in child's physical, mental, social and emotional life. It is a crucial period in one's life. The growth achieved, the experiences gained, responsibilities upheld and the relationships developed at this stage destine the complete future of an individual: Maturity acquired in these years plays the role of an adult in the society or culture. Maturity does not mean mere physical maturity, it also implies mental, emotional and social maturity. An adolescent's growth and developmental pattern along with some peculiar characteristics of this age results in many changes in their life.

Adolescence is often termed as the age of storm and stress. It has so many conflicting situations and problems of adjustment. The origin of such problems are the demands of adolescents. This is the period of maximum growth and development with regard to mental functioning. The intellectual powers like logical thinking, abstract reasoning and concentration are developed in this stage. Intelligence reaches its climax at this stage. Adolescents do not try to follow the track which everyone travels. They develop a fine imagination. They are almost critical of everything. Many writers, artists, poets, philosophers and inventors are born in this period. Adolescence is an age of action. Hero worship is a commonly exhibited behaviour in this period. Adolescents love adventures, wandering fairy tales and develop interest in reading such books. Their area of interest is wide. They have different hobbies

according to their tastes and temperaments. During this period, the adolescents learn to behave according to the norms of their society and culture. They sense their state of being and follow some moral or ethical code. The formation of strong sentiments during this period intensifies the process of moral development. The impact of religion and religious practices is felt for the first time at this age in one's life.

The social circle of an adolescent is very wide. Contrary to childhood, he becomes interested in opposite sex. They believe in intimate friendship. In this period, the social relationships and contacts increase and they tend to create a good deal of social sense. They feel hard to accept rejection especially among their peer group. The other significant change is their relationships with their parents and the family. They crave for independence. They want their personality to be recognised by their parents and the family. They do not prefer to be treated as a child. The main importance is provided to the values and beliefs maintained by their peer group than the advice of their parents. There lies a hidden or open rebellion between the adolescents and their parents. Emotional development is the greatest change that occurs during adolescence period. This is the period of heightening of all emotions like anxiety, fear, love, anger etc. Like an infant, again, adolescents undergo emotional instability and intensity and some individual experiences during this stage. The adolescent turns highly sensitive, inflammable and moody. Therefore, this period is designated as a period of stresses and strains.

The adolescents are not consistent in their emotional expressions. Their emotions fluctuate very frequently and quickly. The current of emotional flow is too intense. This takes their roots into sentiments. Self-consciousness, self-respect and personal pride becomes too much increased. Every teenager is very strong in his motto. What he feels, he feels it very strongly and when he reacts, he reacts vigorously. It is in this age that Ankush and Vee fall in love with one another. They meet in an ice cream parlour. Perhaps it had been fated that Vee's life would take a different turn. The stealing glances of Ankush, his tall figure and the glistening looks are admired by Vee. Their meeting shifts to chats through mails and further continues as outings after their board exams. Gradually, Ankush enquires about Vee's higher studies and future plans. He suggests her to be a model. He helps her to join in his uncle's agency and supports her to excel in her modelling career. He was her moral support. Their relationship continues to some extent. But, after the discovery of

pregnancy, Ankush sounds displeased. He clearly states that he is not ready to be a father. He tries hard to convince her to abort it and continue her career, But Vee is adamant.

During the adolescent period, Ankush enjoys the fantasies of his time. Changes occur in everyone's life. Some changes grow slowly but steadily. Some changes happen overnight. One can never go back to what was before. Likewise, Vee undergoes both the changes one after the other. Ankush is the one reason of all changes; he is the one who supports Vee with regard to her career, but their uncontrollable desire results in her pregnancy. He abandons her in the society when she refuses to abort the child. This leaves Vee perplexed: "How can my life have changed so drastically in less than a year?"

(10) Vee desires to have the baby out of her own choice too. Neither her parents nor Ankush has helped her in any way.

Aryan is the son of Ankush and Vee. Right from his birth, he lives only with his mother. He behaves with an extraordinary maturity. During the tragedy of the paw factor, an animal shelter run by his mother, Vee and Aryan are speechless. They care their pets with utmost care. Aryan grows with them. They are like his siblings. The death of the two Labradors, Shiro and Zoobi emerge as the unbearable tragedy. Dogs have always been a part in Vee's life. Vee and Aryan feel comfortable around them. This has been a challenging situation. Vee is forced to declare the fault with evidence. Soon, the news is broadcast and all other owners have taken back their pets. The paw factor is empty. Vee, who has been emotionally strong during various instances in her life, feels lost in this situation. Alexander Lowen in his book *The Voice of the Body* states: "As adults, we have inhibitions against crying. We feel it is an expression of weakness, or femininity or of childishness. The person who is afraid to cry is afraid of pleasure... Since rigidity develops as a means to block out painful sensations, the release of rigidity or the restoration of the natural motility of the body will bring these painful sensations" (33). In the novel, this hard situation is handled by Aryan in a matured manner. He hugs his mother and caresses her. He reflects the increasing maturity of an adolescent in the form of care.

Aryan is confident enough to take decisions and is always a responsible adult. Suchi, a friend of Vee, looks for a suitor. She tries hard to find a companion for Vee. Vee refuses but Aryan cheers her up. Gradually, Aryan finds a way to contact his father. He always pretends to be contented with his life. He never misses his father is

the conveyed answer of Aryan. He senses that his father has done some folly and his mother is unable to resist and she has shut the doors for him. Aryan doesn't want his mother to be hurt. so, without probing her, he searches a lot for his father's profile. He has found least details and is helpless. He has technically gathered some information from Suchi and has found that Manav is the common friend of Vee and Ankush. He has mailed him and then has contacted Ankush too. Being an adolescent, Aryan has courage to sort all the problems between his parents. His attempts to find his father come as a shock to Vee. As a single mother, she couldn't tolerate her son's challenging decision.

Adolescents, especially boys, growing with single parent experience greater opportunity for involvement in family issues and decision-making. They get less parental control. This greater responsibility and input into decision-making may have either positive or negative consequences. It depends on its timing and embeddedness in an authoritative family atmosphere. Across family types, adolescent development is enhanced by a warm, supportive relationship with a parent. It is accompanied by standards for mature behaviour and consistent discipline. The closeness among the child and the parent is the important link. It creates a conducive environment for emotional growth.

In single parenting, adolescents train themselves to be modifiable. Parental control, discipline and decision-making are related to family structure. These processes can influence outcomes posited to be more negative in many cases. They fail to adjust to their situation too. But Aryan is absolutely ideal. He serves as a disciplined student. His mature behaviour and effective communication show his way of upbringing. A mother's mental growth can be distinguished in many ways. S. Radhakrishnan in his *Essentials of Psychology* states the different levels of mental growth as follows:

We have sense-perception to start with. The senses form the gateways of our knowledge, and (to vary the metaphor) upon their basis is built up the further edifice of knowledge. Imagination, with its two kinds, productive and reproductive, is another stage of mental growth. Reproductive imagination is memory; productive imagination evolves novel construction on previous data. We have next conception, which is thought of the universal (18).

Knowledge begins with sense perception, followed by imagination — both

reproductive (memory) and productive (creativity) — which leads to conceptual thought of universal ideas.

The literature based on psychological trauma is characterised by a relative emphasis on environmental contributors to individual variations in posttraumatic response and recovery. Psychological trauma is a damage to the mind that occurs as a result of a distressing event. Trauma is the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability. Trauma may result from a single distressing experience precipitated in weeks, years, or even decades. The person struggles to cope with the immediate circumstances, eventually leading to serious, long-term negative consequences.

Trauma differs between individuals according to their subjective experiences. They react to their respective traumatic events differently. The renowned clinical psychologist, Karen Saakvitne says: "Psychological trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or of enduring conditions in what the individual's ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is overwhelmed, or the individual experiences a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity" (60). Psychological trauma occurs when an individual is overwhelmed by an event or condition that threatens their life, bodily integrity, or mental stability. This shows that the cognitive recollections of traumatic events affect the bodily states that initially accompanied those events

Vee is a single child. Her parents are busy with their work. Vee's father is a workaholic and a natural entrepreneur. Vee has a poor relationship with her parents. Vee's mother has some illegal affair with a man. Once when Vee is afraid to sleep alone, she enters her mother's bed room and there she hears a strange voice. From that day onwards, Vee has experienced many confusions and most of her expectations are hurt. The day Vee is about to leave to St. Hilda's Convent, she undergoes a strange trauma. She thinks and grieves: "My mother never bid emotional farewells and I think she must have left in relief that I was no longer her responsibility" (49).

Suchi turns out to be vee's good friend from her schooldays. She feels grateful that universe has conspired for them to be together as best friends and soul sister. Suchi's mother cares her daughter as well as Vee. Vee has longed for mother's care. After their final exams, for the first time, Vee has taken Suchi to her home. Vee's mother seems to be a modern woman. She serves as a great host. She has made

time to stay with Vee and Suchi. Everything shocks Vee. Suchi glares at Vee and she justifies Vee's mother. This makes Vee too enraged and too jealous. Suchi says:

You know what Vee; you are behaving like a spoilt brat. Your mother is making an effort and she is so sweet and kind. I think you are horribly biased against her.'...You are being obnoxious. You should know better. (76)

After schooling, Vee gets a chance to excel as a model. She has appeared in the cover of a great magazine. Vee's mother is much excited. She was over the moon after the achievement of Vee. She was ecstatic and Vee basked in the glory of her victory. Her eighteenth birthday has been celebrated as a big party. Her parents invite all their colleagues, neighbours, and relatives. They walk with pride. As days passed, when Vee encounters some health issue, her mother has held her hand in hand. She seems to be tensed. The time Vee opens about her pregnancy, she blurts out vigorously as a typical mother. Vee repels with her arguments. They spat out the words in a rugged manner. Kuppuswamy in his *Psychology and Life* explains about the parenting technique as follows:

Parents may sometimes show an attitude of ambivalence towards the child. Sometimes they shower affection on the child and sometimes they may reject the child and look upon him as a nuisance. They may feel that the child is a big burden and that he comes in the way of their own engagements and enjoyments (131).

Therefore, it is normal that parents exhibit ambivalence toward their child, alternating between affection and rejection, sometimes seeing them as a burden to their personal lives.

Vee's parents feel anxious about the society and its talk, But Vee is too adamant and to have her baby. After many contradictory fights, they have arranged a hospital in Kodaikanal. Again, she joins in a convent. At the sixth month of pregnancy, they landed up in Kodai. It is a pleasant surprise. Vee's father overwhelms with joy. But her mother hardly speaks to her. She strongly forbids her husband to care Vee and her child. She also seems to have undergone some trauma in her life. Her anguished yell to her husband clears it:

'I have had enough. I am tired of this. What if something happens to her? Or the baby? What if we have to re-live that whole nightmare again? You know what we went through and I can't face it again. Hell

– I know how hard it is. What the hell does she even know about raising a child? If she is a child, she should listen to us. She had a great career going and she was doing so well’ (118).

This shocks Vee. The word ‘nightmare’ affects her. The words of her mother hits her psychologically and she feels distressed. That day, the second part of Vee’s life begins. Before the birth of Vee, her parents had lost many children. So, Vee’s mother is afraid to shower her love and concern for her child. Later, she prepares herself to share her hidden affection. This leads her to fall in an illegal affair. In order to show her love, she chooses someone in the universe. She seems to consider this as the nightmare. But, Vee is not aware of this flashback. So, she feels dejected.

Right from childhood, Vee experiences bitter memories with her mother. The fact behind the rudeness of her mother is revealed later by her father. Even the death news of her mother doesn’t make sense to Vee in any way. She becomes stubborn: ‘For me, her death was the final closure in what had been one of the most disturbing relationships in my life. All I wanted from her was a little bit of love and acceptance. I remembered... Even in her death, I couldn’t forgive her. So deep was my pain’ (146). Emotions are complex mental states with the feeling element in a predominant degree aroused by the perception of objects which affect our conative tendencies. There is an expression for every emotion. This expression complicates the nature of the emotion by sending back organic and kinaesthetic sensations. Every emotion has its expression illustrated by an analysis of fear.

The young boy, Aryan, is a teenager. He is highly connected towards his mother. He understands his mother and wants her to live a better life. He has kept his mother occupied with joy at all times. Even at the time Vee scolds him for his poor grades, his look conveys, “I – can – defy – you – and – there – is – nothing – you – can – do – about – it.” (1). This pose is common among most of the teens when they reach a certain height. He analyses that his mother still feels a hollow pain whenever his father’s name is mentioned. Being an adolescent, he has an urge to find out the identity of his father and to solve the conflict among his parents. Aryan has felt a little insecure as he is under the control of his mother. He feels jealous when his friends discuss about their father and the happy life. Finally, his efforts have ripened fruitfully. Vee, Aryan and Ankush are in the ride of their lives together. Their reunion serves as a happy ending. Finally, the sayings of Manav, “it happens for a reason” (256) has come true.

In this research article, the trauma endured by Vee as a single child of dignified parents and as a single mother of her child Aryan is disclosed effectively. Her transposed way of parental care and looking after her son's needs are unique, in turn, Aryan, as a well raised adolescent, serves as the best son.

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