

Research Article

Dreams, Doubts, and Destinies: An Exploration of Contemporary Life in *Everyone Has a Story*

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Abstract: Contemporary Indian popular fiction often foregrounds the interior lives of ordinary individuals as they navigate aspiration, uncertainty, and self-definition in rapidly changing social contexts. *Everyone Has a Story* by Savi Sharma exemplifies this narrative trend by interweaving multiple character trajectories that reveal the emotional and psychological textures of everyday existence. The novel offers a nuanced portrayal of how dreams are shaped, deferred, and reimagined, thereby opening a space to examine the dynamics between personal desire and lived reality. By focusing on the subtle interplay of hope, doubt, and determination, this study highlights the significance of ordinary voices in articulating broader contemporary experiences. The text provides valuable insight into the ways individuals negotiate uncertainty while striving for meaning and fulfillment, making it particularly relevant to discussions of youth consciousness, relational dynamics, and evolving life choices in modern India. The paper adopts a qualitative textual analysis, drawing closely on selected passages to explore recurring motifs, character development, and narrative strategies. Through careful interpretation of key moments in the novel, it examines how storytelling functions as a medium for expressing inner conflict and transformation. The study argues that the novel underscores the power of personal narratives in shaping identity and resilience.

Keywords: Identity; Aspiration; Self-Discovery; Contemporary Life

Introduction

Literature has long served as a medium through which human experiences, emotions, and aspirations are articulated and preserved. As Aristotle observes, "Poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history: for poetry speaks of the universal, history of the particular." This emphasis on universality enables literary works to transcend individual narratives and reflect broader patterns of human life. In contemporary fiction, this universality often emerges through simple, relatable stories that foreground ordinary individuals and their lived realities. The significance of storytelling lies in its ability to give meaning to human existence. E. M. Forster succinctly notes, "The king died, and then the queen died of grief is a story," highlighting how narrative is shaped by emotional causality rather than mere sequence. Similarly, Salman Rushdie asserts, "Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives lack power over their lives themselves." Such perspectives reinforce the idea that storytelling is not only representational but also deeply connected to identity and agency. The relationship between narrative and selfhood has been widely acknowledged in literary discourse. Joan Didion famously writes, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live," emphasizing the psychological necessity of narrative in making sense of experience. In a similar vein, Chinua Achebe remarks, "Stories are not innocent: they shape our understanding of ourselves and our world," suggesting that storytelling actively constructs meaning rather than merely reflecting it.

Contemporary fiction, particularly in the Indian context, often foregrounds the voices of ordinary individuals as they navigate aspirations, relationships, and uncertainties. As Jhumpa Lahiri notes, "That's the thing about books. They let you travel without moving your feet," indicating how narratives extend lived experience beyond immediate reality. Furthermore, C. S. Lewis observes, "We read to know we are not alone," highlighting the role of literature in fostering connection and shared understanding. The exploration of personal journeys and emotional realities is particularly evident in popular fiction, where simplicity becomes a powerful narrative tool. Ernest Hemingway emphasizes this through his assertion, "Prose is architecture, not interior decoration," suggesting that clarity and structure are central to effective storytelling. Likewise, Leo Tolstoy reflects, "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," underscoring how individual experiences, though unique, resonate with universal emotional truths.

In this context, *Everyone Has a Story* by Savi Sharma stands as a representative work of contemporary Indian fiction, capturing the nuances of everyday life through simple yet evocative storytelling. The novel interweaves themes of aspiration, self-discovery, emotional struggle, and interpersonal relationships, presenting characters whose journeys reflect the complexities of modern existence. Drawing on these perspectives, the present study examines how the novel articulates contemporary life through its portrayal of aspirations, character development, narrative simplicity, and interpersonal connections. By situating the text within broader literary discussions of storytelling and human experience, the paper highlights how even the most ordinary narratives can offer profound insights into the search for meaning in today's world.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretative approach centered on the primary text, *Everyone Has a Story* by Savi Sharma. It is based on close reading and textual analysis, examining selected passages to understand character development, narrative techniques, and representations of contemporary life. The analysis focuses on paraphrasing and interpreting key moments to trace recurring themes such as aspiration, self-discovery, and interpersonal relationships. A thematic framework is used to organize the discussion, enabling a clear and structured exploration of the text. By relying primarily on the novel itself, the study emphasizes internal textual dynamics, allowing meanings to emerge directly from the narrative while maintaining analytical clarity and coherence.

Literature Review

As a relatively recent work in contemporary Indian popular fiction, *Everyone Has a Story* by Savi Sharma has received wide readership and popular acclaim; however, it has not yet generated substantial academic criticism. The absence of dedicated research articles or critical studies on the novel indicates that it remains an underexplored text within formal literary discourse. In the absence of direct scholarly engagement, the present study positions the novel within the broader context of contemporary Indian English fiction, particularly narratives that focus on everyday life, personal aspirations, and emotional journeys. Existing literary discussions of popular fiction emphasize the simplicity of narration, the relatability of characters, and the portrayal of ordinary experiences as key elements that resonate with modern readers. These general perspectives provide a contextual framework for approaching the novel, even though specific critical work on the text itself is limited. This gap in the existing literature underscores the significance of the current study, which seeks to initiate a critical conversation about the novel by examining its thematic concerns, characterization, and narrative style. By offering a close textual analysis, the paper contributes to the emerging academic engagement with contemporary popular fiction and opens avenues for further research on similar works.

Representation of Everyday Aspirations and Life Choices

Everyday aspirations in contemporary fiction are often intertwined with economic limitations and personal responsibilities, compelling individuals to redefine their life trajectories. The novel presents such lived realities through characters whose choices emerge not from ideal circumstances but from necessity, thereby reflecting the tension between personal ambition and situational demands.

Kabir's narrative reveals how financial instability reshapes individual aspirations at a crucial stage of life. He explains that after his father's sudden illness and retirement, the family's limited resources were exhausted in medical treatment, leaving him with no option but to discontinue his education and seek employment to support his household. This decision, though difficult, becomes a turning point, as he eventually secures a job at the café and gradually stabilizes his family's condition (Sharma 49–50). This moment illustrates how aspiration is not always about achieving personal dreams

but often about adapting to circumstances. Kabir's choice signifies a transition from self-oriented goals to collective responsibility, where survival and stability take precedence over education and individual growth. Such a portrayal reflects the lived experiences of many middle-class individuals, in which success is defined by sacrifice and endurance rather than conventional achievement. Alongside his economic struggles, Kabir's emotional choices further deepen the representation of everyday life. His quiet affection for Nisha is expressed through small, consistent gestures, serving her coffee without charge and absorbing the cost himself. These actions, driven by unspoken care, suggest that emotional investment often operates beyond rational decision-making, becoming an integral part of one's lived experience (Sharma 51–52).

The narrative thus presents aspiration not as a singular, goal-oriented pursuit but as a layered experience shaped by responsibility, emotion, and circumstance. Kabir's journey demonstrates that life choices are rarely ideal; instead, they are negotiated within constraints, where even small acts acquire profound meaning. In this way, the novel foregrounds the complexity of ordinary lives, where dreams persist, though often in altered and understated forms. The unfolding of Kabir's relationship with Nisha further complicates the notion of aspiration, shifting it from survival-driven choices to emotionally and morally charged decisions. As everyday life intersects with unexpected circumstances, individuals are often required to respond not only with practicality but also with emotional courage, thereby redefining their understanding of responsibility and commitment. Kabir's interaction with Nisha takes a decisive turn when she returns to the café, no longer visibly distressed, and expresses gratitude for his quiet acts of kindness. She reveals that her emotional suffering stemmed from a failed relationship that led to an unplanned pregnancy, abandonment, and eventual abortion, which had pushed her to the brink of despair. In this moment of vulnerability, Kabir responds not merely with sympathy but with an impulsive yet sincere declaration of love, offering to marry her despite the social and personal complexities involved (Sharma 53–56). This episode highlights how life choices are not always premeditated but can emerge from deeply felt emotional convictions. Kabir's proposal challenges conventional expectations of calculated decision-making, instead presenting love as a force that disrupts rational boundaries. His willingness to accept responsibility for a situation that is not socially or biologically his own suggests an alternative moral framework in which compassion and emotional truth take precedence over societal judgment.

However, the narrative does not romanticize this decision without acknowledging its practical implications. Kabir's hesitation to proceed with the marriage stems from his awareness of economic disparity and his desire to provide a stable future. He recognizes that love alone cannot sustain a family and aspires to create better opportunities for his future children, particularly in education and lifestyle. This leads to the emergence of a new goal, the establishment of his own café as a means to bridge the gap between emotional desire and material necessity (Sharma 57–59).

Here, aspiration evolves into a forward-looking vision shaped by both love and responsibility. Kabir's dream of owning a café is no longer merely a personal ambition

but has become intertwined with his commitment to Nisha and his imagined future family. However, this aspiration is accompanied by uncertainty and fear, reflecting the inherent risks of transforming dreams into reality. The intervention of Vivaan, who offers financial support through a business partnership, introduces another dimension to life choices: the role of trust and human connection in enabling aspiration. This moment underscores how individual dreams are often realized through collective support systems rather than isolated effort. The naming of “Kafe Kabir” symbolizes not only the materialization of a long-held dream but also the convergence of different life paths shaped by shared experiences (Sharma 59–60). Parallel to Kabir’s journey, Meera’s introspection reveals another layer of everyday aspiration. Observing the transformations around her, she begins to question her own place within these changing dynamics, particularly her ambition to become a writer. Her reflections capture the uncertainty that accompanies personal dreams when confronted with the evolving realities of others’ lives, suggesting that aspiration is often accompanied by self-doubt and a search for belonging (Sharma 60–61).

Through these interconnected experiences, the novel presents everyday aspirations as fluid and multifaceted, shaped by emotional impulses, economic considerations, and interpersonal relationships. Life choices are depicted not as fixed decisions but as ongoing negotiations, where individuals continuously balance desire, fear, and responsibility while striving to give meaning to their lives.

Characterization and the Journey of Self-Discovery

The novel constructs its characters through gradual emotional evolution, where self-discovery emerges not as a sudden realization but as a process shaped by relationships, introspection, and shared experiences. The interactions among the central characters create a space in which personal identities are questioned, reshaped, and more clearly understood over time. The development of Meera’s character becomes particularly significant as she begins to recognize her own emotional depth through her association with Kabir, Nisha, and Vivaan. As their friendship strengthens during the establishment of Kafe Kabir, Meera observes the bond between Kabir and Nisha and starts to internalize her own longing for a similar connection. Encouraged by Nisha, she becomes aware that her growing attachment to Vivaan is not merely a casual interest but a deeper emotional commitment that she has been hesitant to acknowledge openly (Sharma 77–78). This moment marks an important stage in Meera’s journey, where external observation leads to internal realization. Her self-awareness is not formed in isolation but through comparison and emotional resonance with those around her. The recognition of her feelings signifies a shift from passive experience to active emotional engagement, indicating the beginning of her personal transformation.

Despite this realization, Meera’s hesitation reveals the psychological complexity involved in self-discovery. She expresses a fear of rejection and uncertainty about Vivaan’s response, which prevents her from articulating her emotions directly. This internal conflict illustrates how self-discovery is often accompanied by vulnerability, in which understanding one’s feelings does not immediately translate into the courage to act on them (Sharma 78–79). At the same time, Kabir’s advice underscores the need to

take action to complete this journey. His insistence that unexpressed emotions may lead to missed opportunities highlights an important dimension of self-discovery that realization must eventually be followed by decision. This interplay between awareness and hesitation reflects the realistic portrayal of emotional growth in the novel. Vivaan's poem further deepens the thematic exploration of inner conflict. His lines suggest that fear arises not from external circumstances but from internal contradictions between dreams and reality, beginnings and endings, and, most significantly, the self and its own uncertainties. The articulation of being "afraid of the self" underscores the idea that self-discovery involves confronting one's own insecurities and unresolved emotions (Sharma 79–80).

Through these character interactions, the narrative presents self-discovery as a layered and ongoing process. Meera's journey, in particular, illustrates that understanding oneself requires both reflection and risk. The characters do not arrive at fixed identities; instead, they continue to evolve through their choices, fears, and emotional connections, making self-discovery a dynamic and deeply personal experience. The trajectory of self-discovery in the novel reaches a critical point when emotional dependence is disrupted, forcing the individual to confront loss, absence, and personal vulnerability. Such moments of rupture play a significant role in shaping character depth, compelling individuals to reassess their emotional foundations and sense of identity. Meera's development takes a decisive turn with Vivaan's sudden and unexplained departure. Despite her growing emotional clarity and the courage she had begun to gather to confess her feelings, she is instead met with silence and absence. His phone remains unreachable, and soon she learns that he has resigned from his job and left without informing anyone, choosing to "escape" from his existing life. This abrupt withdrawal leaves her emotionally shattered, as she struggles to comprehend how someone so central to her emotional world could disappear without closure (Sharma 81–83). This moment intensifies Meera's internal conflict, as her self-awareness is now confronted with emotional loss. The realization of her love comes simultaneously with the impossibility of expressing it, creating a space where unspoken feelings transform into regret and longing. Her reaction, marked by disbelief, grief, and a sense of abandonment, reveals the fragile nature of emotional realization when it is not reciprocated or acknowledged.

The absence of closure becomes central to her journey of self-discovery. Vivaan's decision to leave without a farewell challenges Meera's expectations of emotional continuity and forces her to confront a reality where not all relationships resolve. Her repeated attempts to contact him and her eventual breakdown illustrate how deeply her identity had begun to intertwine with his presence (Sharma 83–84). At the same time, this disruption initiates a subtle shift in her understanding of self. Kabir's attempt to console her by redirecting her attention toward her writing introduces an alternative path, one that emphasizes personal growth independent of emotional reliance. Although Meera initially resists this idea, feeling disconnected from both her surroundings and her aspirations, the suggestion foregrounds the possibility that self-discovery may emerge through loss as much as through connection. Her reflection that the café no longer holds the same meaning underscores a transformation in perception.

What was once a space of comfort, companionship, and storytelling becomes a reminder of absence and emotional rupture. This shift indicates that self-discovery is not merely about recognizing one's desires but also about navigating the void created when those desires remain unfulfilled (Sharma 84–85). Throughout this phase of emotional disorientation, the narrative deepens its characterization by portraying self-discovery as an ongoing, often painful process. Meera's journey suggests that understanding oneself is inseparable from experiencing loss, as it exposes the extent of one's emotional dependence while simultaneously opening the possibility for inner resilience. The character is thus positioned at a threshold, where personal growth no longer depends solely on relationships but must begin to emerge from within.

Narrative Simplicity and the Power of Storytelling

The narrative strength of the novel lies in its deliberate simplicity, where storytelling unfolds through everyday language, intimate reflections, and emotionally direct situations. This simplicity does not diminish the depth of the narrative; rather, it enhances the reader's engagement by allowing complex emotions to emerge from ordinary experiences. The text demonstrates how storytelling can function as a deeply personal act, shaped by memory, absence, and longing.

Following Vivaan's disappearance, Meera's relationship with writing undergoes a significant transformation. What once served as a creative outlet becomes emotionally overwhelming, as she struggles to confront blank pages that now reflect her internal emptiness. Her attempts to continue writing are repeatedly interrupted by grief, as she revisits her work and finds herself overcome with emotion. The act of tracing her name on the unfinished book symbolizes both attachment to her dream and hesitation to move forward, indicating that storytelling has become inseparable from her personal loss (Sharma 86). This moment reveals how narrative simplicity allows emotional authenticity to surface without mediation. The absence of elaborate description mirrors Meera's psychological state, fragmented, uncertain, and deeply affected by absence. The blank page itself becomes symbolic, representing not only a pause in writing but also an interruption in the continuity of life.

Nisha's intervention introduces another dimension to storytelling, framing life as a narrative shaped by unpredictability and experience. She presents the idea that individuals enter one's life either as temporary influences or lasting companions, suggesting that every relationship contributes to personal growth. Her encouragement that Meera should focus on her aspiration to become an author reflects the belief that storytelling can provide direction even in moments of emotional disorientation (Sharma 86–87). At this stage, storytelling emerges as both a challenge and a necessity. Meera recognizes that completing her narrative requires confronting her emotional reality, yet she remains uncertain about how to do so without Vivaan, who has become central to her story. Her fear that she may never see him again intensifies this struggle, as the absence of closure disrupts not only her personal life but also the structure of her narrative. Vivaan's earlier reflections on travel further deepen the thematic significance of storytelling. His desire to explore the world not as a passive observer but as an active participant, immersing himself in different cultures, leaving fragments of himself

behind, and carrying pieces of each place forward, suggests a narrative philosophy rooted in experience and transformation. His vision of life as a continuous journey, marked by exchange and discovery, aligns with the broader idea that stories are formed through movement, encounter, and change (Sharma 88).

This perspective complicates Meera's understanding of narrative closure. If Vivaan's life is defined by departure and incompleteness, then her attempt to construct a fixed and complete story becomes inherently unstable. Her resistance to ending the story in loss reflects a desire for coherence and meaning, yet her lived experience contradicts this expectation. The tension between her ideal narrative and her reality highlights how storytelling often involves negotiating between what is desired and what is experienced. The emotional intensity of this struggle is further reflected in Meera's withdrawal from her surroundings. She becomes increasingly silent, detached from conversations, and uncertain about her own aspirations. Her sense of confidence and purpose appears to diminish as she questions whether her dreams still exist independently or have been intertwined with Vivaan's presence. This internal conflict suggests that storytelling, while powerful, is also vulnerable to emotional disruption (Sharma 88–89). Even in moments of solitude, storytelling continues to shape her perception. As she drives home, the sunset's natural imagery evokes Vivaan's voice and his dream of traveling the world. The blending of memory and present experience illustrates how narrative operates beyond written text, influencing how individuals interpret their surroundings. Her quiet address to Vivaan, imagining that he might be witnessing the same sunset elsewhere, reflects an attempt to maintain connection through narrative imagination.

Thus, the novel uses simplicity not as a limitation but as a deliberate narrative strategy. The straightforward language, minimalistic structure, and emotionally direct expressions allow the story to unfold with immediacy and sincerity. Storytelling becomes a space where absence is negotiated, memories are preserved, and meaning is continually reconstructed. Even in its incompleteness, the narrative affirms that stories do not require resolution to hold significance; rather, their power lies in their ability to capture the ongoing, unfinished nature of human experience.

Conclusion

Contemporary life, as reflected in popular fiction, is increasingly defined by the search for meaning within relationships, personal aspirations, and emotional experiences. In a rapidly changing social environment, individuals often navigate uncertainty, attachment, and self-realization through their connections with others. The novel captures this dynamic by presenting characters whose lives are shaped not by extraordinary events, but by the depth of their interpersonal bonds and the choices that emerge from them. The exploration of everyday aspirations reveals how individual lives are deeply influenced by circumstances that demand compromise and resilience. Kabir's journey demonstrates that aspirations are often reconfigured through responsibility, where personal desires are aligned with familial obligations and future stability. His transition from economic struggle to entrepreneurial ambition reflects

how meaning is constructed through perseverance and the desire to create a better life, not only for oneself but also for others.

The process of self-discovery unfolds through emotional engagement and vulnerability. Meera's evolving awareness of her feelings for Vivaan highlights how identity is shaped through relationships, where external interactions lead to internal realization. Her hesitation, fear of rejection, and eventual confrontation with loss illustrate that self-discovery is not a linear process but one marked by uncertainty and emotional risk. The absence of closure in her relationship further emphasizes that understanding oneself often emerges through moments of disruption rather than resolution. The simplicity of the narrative plays a crucial role in conveying these experiences, allowing complex emotional states to be expressed through direct and relatable storytelling. The struggles associated with writing, memory, and absence demonstrate that storytelling is not merely a creative act but a means of processing lived reality. The incompleteness of Meera's narrative mirrors the incompleteness of life itself, suggesting that meaning does not depend on perfect endings but on the willingness to engage with ongoing experiences. The novel presents interpersonal connections as central to the search for meaning in contemporary life. Relationships serve as catalysts for growth, shaping aspirations, influencing decisions, and deepening self-awareness. Even in moments of separation and loss, these connections leave lasting imprints, guiding individuals toward new understandings of themselves and their place in the world. Through its portrayal of ordinary lives and emotional journeys, the text affirms that meaning is not a fixed destination but a continuous process, constructed through connection, experience, and the enduring power of human relationships.

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