

# LUMINAIRE

**Conference Proceedings of the  
12th International Interdisciplinary Conference  
on**

# Narratives, Media & Mental Health: Exploring the Impact of Storytelling on Psychological Wellbeing

**ISSN: 22492542**

**Vol IX Issue 2**  
**November 2024**



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## FOREWORD

It is with great pride and anticipation that we present the proceedings of the 12th International Interdisciplinary Conference on *Narratives, Media, and Mental Health: Exploring the Impact of Storytelling on Psychological Wellbeing*, organized by the School of Indian and Foreign Languages at Garden City University. This annual conference has become a cornerstone of our institution's commitment to fostering dialogue across disciplines, and this year's theme could not be more timely or relevant.

In a world increasingly influenced by digital and social media, the interplay between storytelling, media representations, and mental health has emerged as a critical area of study. Stories shape our understanding of the world, and narratives—whether in literature, cinema, journalism, or social media—have profound implications for how mental health is perceived, discussed, and addressed. They hold the power to inform, inspire, and educate, but also to stigmatize, distort, and mislead. Recognizing this duality, the conference seeks to unravel the complex and multilayered connections between media, narratives, and psychological well-being.

The concept note for this conference captures the essence of its purpose: to investigate how media depictions reflect societal attitudes towards mental health and how they, in turn, influence those attitudes. This mission is particularly crucial in an era when media consumption is at an all-time high, and mental health challenges are becoming increasingly prevalent across demographics. Accurate and sensitive portrayals in media can foster empathy, reduce stigma, and promote awareness, while inaccurate or sensationalized depictions can perpetuate misconceptions and silence those in need of support.

The conference has identified several pivotal themes to guide this exploration. Among them, the accuracy of media portrayals of mental health stands out as a key concern. Whether through fictional narratives, journalistic reporting, or social media campaigns, the ways in which mental health issues are depicted can either empower individuals or exacerbate harmful stereotypes. Alongside this, the conference examines the complex relationship between social media and mental well-being. Platforms that connect individuals and amplify voices can also become sources of stress, anxiety, and isolation, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the youth.

Another vital area of focus is the transformative potential of personal recovery narratives. Stories of resilience and healing not only humanize mental health challenges but also provide hope and a sense of community. By showcasing such narratives, the conference highlights their role in reshaping public perception and inspiring systemic change. Equally significant is the role of journalism in reporting mental health issues. Ethical and informed reporting can contribute to public understanding, while sensationalism can perpetuate stigma and misinformation.

The therapeutic potential of storytelling—another theme of the conference—reminds us of the healing power inherent in creative expression. Literature, art, and other narrative forms offer individuals a means to process experiences, make sense of their emotions, and connect with others. As mental health professionals increasingly recognize the value of narrative therapy, this intersection of storytelling and well-being has become a fertile ground for research and practice.

These proceedings are a testament to the depth and diversity of the discussions that took place during the conference. They capture the collective efforts of individuals dedicated to advancing

our understanding of mental health in media, and to promoting representations that are responsible, empowering, and reflective of the complexities of human experience.

As you explore the proceedings, we hope you are inspired by the insights and ideas contained within. More importantly, we hope they serve as a catalyst for continued dialogue and action. By addressing the intersections of narratives, media, and mental health, we move closer to a world where stories are a source of empowerment rather than harm, and where media representations contribute to a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Let this collection of knowledge and reflections serve as a foundation for further research, advocacy, and collaboration. Together, we can harness the power of narratives and media to foster understanding, challenge stigma, and promote mental well-being on a global scale.

Warm Regards

Conveners

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# **NARRATING THE NUANCES OF A NEW NATION: A STUDY OF CONFLICT IN MEGHNA PANT'S *THE MAN WHO LOST INDIA***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Meghna Pant is a multifaceted person and multiple award-winning author. She is an Indian author, screenwriter, journalist, columnist, speaker as well as a feminist known for her works in both fiction and non-fiction. The Man Who Lost India, set in the year 2032, is an electrifying and remarkable novel by Meghna Pant introduced to the literary world. It is a socio-political futuristic fiction set in and between China and India, portraying the disastrous effects of a Chinese arrival into the Indian town of Lalbag. During the book release at the Title Waves bookstore in Mumbai, Meghna Pant said that people are calling this a war novel but it's actually a peace novel. It's her sort of messaging to the world about unpacking the China and India dilemma. This paper narrates the nuances of a new nation and its conflict in the novel through the lens of Conflict Theory, of Karl Marx, examining the controversies of war, political and social issues, power dynamics, geopolitical corruption due to climate change, competition for scarce resources, new nation ideologies and psychological trauma within the novel. It observes how Meghna Pant defines the war between China and India as a quest for peace rather than just a war narrative.*

## **KEY WORDS**

*War and Peace, Conflict Theory, New Nation Ideologies, Power dynamics, Psychological trauma.*

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Meghna Pant is a multifaceted person and multiple award-winning author. She is an Indian author, screenwriter, journalist, columnist, speaker as well as a feminist known for her works in both fiction and non-fiction. Pant began her writing career with a strong interest in storytelling and a desire to use both fiction and non-fiction to explore complex social issues. She has been honoured with various awards for her contribution to literature, journalism and gender issues.



*The Man Who Lost India* is a socio-political futuristic fiction, set in the year 2032 is an electrifying and remarkable novel by Meghna Pant to the literary world. It was first published in India by Simon and Schuster India in February 2024. The novel's editor has informed her that it is the first dystopian war novel ever written in Indian history by a female author. It took 10 years for her to complete this novel because she says that she has been frozen with cognitive dissonance that, can a woman even write war novels. Once a man told her that women cannot write war novels, which by itself prompted Meghna Pant to write a novel *The Man Who Lost India*. It's her most experimental work which contains different themes and beliefs that has made an impact that a woman can write war novels because Pant opines that novels have no gender.

The novel is set in the dystopian future in and between India and China, portraying the disastrous effects of a Chinese invasion on the Indian town of Lalbagh. The war has an abrupt end when a supernatural power saves the obscure town of Lalbagh from destruction. The novel *The Man Who Lost India* opens with an epigraph “Man will not be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest.” a quotation of Denis Diderot, a French philosopher, art critic and prominent figure during the “Age of Enlightenment”. The epigraph itself creates tension and foreshadows the sufferings of the people in the novel by the intervention of China into the place called Lalbagh in Punjab. Themes such as war, love, strife, family, geopolitical corruption, climate change and resource scarcity, socio-political issues, human experience and peace have been employed, like Meghna Pant her novel is also a thought provoking and multifaceted novel. It is a masterly crafted work, brilliantly chiselled with socio-political aspects of today's world along with the supernatural elements. War plays a vital role in the novel. This paper states that cooperation will help to bring peace rather than competition, which will bring conflict. This novel is viewed in the light of Conflict Theory propagated by Karl Marx.

Conflict Theory is one of the sociological theories, rooted from the works of Karl Marx, who was a German philosopher, historian, economist, sociologist, political theorist, journalist and revolutionary socialist. Conflict Theory focuses on the idea that society is in a state of eternal conflict due to the competition for limited resources. It emphasizes the power struggles, class conflicts, and social injustices that affect human society, finds a fertile foundation in this story. Marx argues that all human history has always had conflict in it. Conflict is the fuel of a story, which leads the plot of the novel. It is important to note that, for the conflict theorists, ‘War’ can be a unifier or sometimes a cleanser of a society. Here power plays a crucial role in domination. Conflict Theory suggests war is a manifestation of broader societal struggles, as depicted in the novel between China and India, extending beyond military confrontation. According to conflict theory, the powerful will construct legal frameworks, cultural customs, and other social structures to uphold their own supremacy and keep others from joining them at all times. Many elements of Marxist Conflict Theory were adapted by German sociologist, philosopher, jurist, and political economist Max Weber, who also went on to further develop some of Marx's concepts.

In the novel *The Man Who Lost India* Meghna Pant conveys that a powerful nation like China controls India through all aspects such as domination of Chinese ideologies and language with the collaboration of Indian ideologies, controlling of the world's water supply, banning of

Indian apps, internet, driving cars and their ideas of creating a new nation. New China controls a lot of what happens in Lalbag from food supply to information and it has full control over the surveillance of the people which affects the freedom of their personal life and psyche of the people. Through the lens of Conflict Theory this paper examines the nuances of ideological and geological conflict in the narrative, emphasizing how psychological pain, political and social unrest, and war influence the concept of a new nation identity in the novel.

The construction of a new nation identity in the midst of turmoil and strife is one of the narrative's main topics. The greater societal struggle for a national consciousness is mirrored in the individuals' search for identification and belonging in a broken society. In the context of post-colonial India, where the effects of imperialism, colonialism, and persisting socio-political issues continue to influence national identity, this theme is especially compatible. The novel's depiction of endurance and efforts of the characters to rebuild in the face of hardship represents the possibility of a new, more equal society emerging from the ruins of the past.

The concept of a new nation in this novel is not creating a literal geographical area but it is an ideology of creating a new nation in the minds of an individual, society and a nation by occupying their land and minds. In one of the signboards of China in the border between Lalbag and New China, there is a mural with Chinaman and Chinawallah man shaking hands with an inscription, "War no more, cooperation will build a new nation" (33), which highlights the belief that cooperation, instead of fighting and war, is a superior way to create sustainable growth, progress, and a nation's power. In this novel, India doesn't fight against China because they have already captured most of India, named it as New China except Lalbag and all the people are following the rules and regulations laid by China. In addition, the novel introduces a distinct geopolitical scenario. The only country that offers hope is Israel, which welcomes Indian refugees. This results in a dramatic irony, even for the displaced Hindus of Lalbag, Jerusalem - a holy land becomes their 'promised land'.

Conflict Theory states that ongoing disputes and fights among various groups are what propel social development. This dynamic is highlighted by the novel's depiction of societal fragmentation and the rise of new forms of division and solidarity. The characters' capacity to reconstruct their lives, find love, and create new relationships in the midst of disaster is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the potential for good change.

Through the voice of a character named Manu, the author highlights,

"...I'm saying that this is an ideology, not a war. India had to be merged with China to stem the impact of climate change. People had to be killed so others could be saved. The war is not military but tactical" (43).

Lalbag, a small town in Punjab and the last remaining part of India, which is a tiny dot, that was left by all the cartographers without recognising it easily in the map. So, China uses the idea that, in Chinese the word "Crisis" is marked with two brush strokes on the place of Lalbag for recognition; one represents 'danger' and another one represents 'opportunity'. This use of metaphor demonstrates how the crisis contains both danger and possibility on the small town.

This particular context refers to the strategical and tactical positioning of the Chinamen around Lalbagh using this dual nature of crisis to prepare for the right time to destroy Mt. Akaho and to achieve their goal of conquering the town to show their power to the world.

In the novel Meghna Pant makes a subtle remark about ‘The doctrine of Absolute Territorial Sovereignty,’ that allows upstream nations like China for absolute control over downstream nations like India which nobody talks about. The opinion written in 1895 by the 41st Attorney General of the United States, Judson Harmon, in response to a request for advice from the Department of State regarding a dispute with Mexico over the use of Rio Grande waters, is most commonly identified as ‘The Doctrine of Absolute Territorial Sovereignty’ or ‘The Harmon Doctrine.’ For seventy years after the 1962 Sino-Indian War, tensions had been building, especially following a humiliating incident in Sikkim involving India and China. When these tensions erupted, China decisively acted, disregarding the disputed border, and effectively neutralized much of India. This suggests that victory in war often comes when one side lacks a unified moral stance. Meghna Pant's reference to the Sino-Indian War of 1962 in her novel *The Man Who Lost India* signifies the enduring tensions and historical conflicts between India and China. By mentioning this war, Pant highlights the longstanding unresolved issues and the cyclical nature of aggression, setting a historical context that deepens the narrative's exploration of contemporary political and social upheavals. This reference serves to remind readers of the past hostilities and their impact on current events, emphasizing the persistent threats and fears in the region.

Meghna Pant is concerned that China and India are going to war over climate change. India has many rivers such as the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Krishna, the Narmadha, the Godhavari, and the Meghna, so China is going to attack India for water at some point because they are tapping into scarce resources and they are going to become the water hegemon in Asia in order for their survival. It's going to be a biggest threat to India as well as for the whole world. Pant has a ‘perception warfare’ that, due to the impact of the past, present and climate change, she opines that it will definitely affect the future. Conflict Theory can also be applied here which emphasizes the competition for scarce resources as well as violent and non-violent competition. It disturbs the lives of people who live in India. Each and every character in this novel feels the impact of the war and controversies in their lifestyle.

Life in Lalbag has been severely disrupted by China's interruption in India. In the novel, Pant has highlighted that China began a war for regional dominance, who wants to have control over all the nations. The bomb attack on the temple atop Mount Akaho, a sacred and historic location, represents the violence at Lalbag. Strict rules and laws have been implemented by China in the wake of this incident, restricting driving which has paralyzed daily life, banning Indian apps, internet, text messages, cosmetics, fuel is rationed, Indo-Chinese game is introduced, and the calls have been overheard by the Chinamen. It is illegal to gather in groups of more than three people; a rule is also imposed by China. They captured most of India and established New China except Lalbag. The brutal regime is exemplified by the use of prisoners of war for their works such as digging graves for Indians who are going to be killed and they are ill-treated. The irony

is Mi Bingbing, a Chinese cop who says “We Chinese are peace lover” (238), but actually creating problems in India.

The use of language by the Chinese cops looks silly at times as they use offensive terms too. They used to call Indians as ‘Yindu’ and they have misspellings and useless signboards such as “Accident Porn Area” (47). China's aggressive actions are motivated by its unquenchable demand for water, China greedily eyed on another H2O nation India, to satisfy their thirst. It sees India's resources as a solution for their scarcity. This avarice even goes so far as to rename people and companies to represent Chinese dominance; for example, Seth became Lao Seth Singh, and neighbourhood stalls adopted the name Chindia, also they have introduced their food items. This shows the imposition of multicultural ideology on India.

China's failure to get Lalbag and its temple turned into bloody confrontations, leaving dead bodies along the disputed borders as a somber reminder of the ongoing war. China builds a vast highway connecting India to New China in order to establish military and economic domination and to consolidate power. In one very terrifying scene, Manu, a house help, is forced by a Chinese cop to steal and bring the holy Shiva statue from the Mt. Akaho temple. The temple is once more bombed and shattered, wiping out cultural legacy. These deeds highlight the extent to which New China has dominated Lalbag and shaped the town's character and way of life.

The quote "Peace does not fall from the sky, but war certainly does"(5) conveys the idea that obtaining peace involves intention, hard work, and effort whereas war can break out abruptly and without any notice, frequently beyond people's control. Even the book cover narrates the cruelty of war between China and India. It was intelligently crafted by the book cover designer Pinaki De, graphic illustrator-designer, which shows the clash between Tiger and Dragon separated by an electric barbed wire fence. The story of the novel starts with the threatening headlines read by Seth regarding China's attack on India, meanwhile the loud explosion from the neighbouring town of Karbagh is heard and people are terrified. Then murdering of Nandini's family is seen by Seth's family and servants. Chinese soldiers have taken away Nandini, Ida's friend with them and they don't know what will happen to Nandini. On looking at the dead bodies and the condition of Nandini, Seth freezes and Ida screams aloud.

The war to capture Lalbag begins with a shot of bullets. “After all, business is war and war is business.” (125) for them. Driving cars have been abandoned, the roads are almost empty. Windows of many homes are sealed with black paper for fear of bomb attack, people don't want to be seen or heard. Seth and Manu want to rescue Ida and their families. When the war begins Manu hears explosions, shouts and screams. From a distance he can smell the burning of tires, cars and human bodies. Everywhere there are signs of war, ambulance, school bus and buildings were attacked. Chinese flags hung on the electric poles and lampposts and the Chinese National Anthem is heard. No respect is given to the dead. War turns water into blood and leads people deeper into tragedy.

Besides war, one of the central themes of the novel is the psychological impact that the war has on people. As the Chinese cops' interruption begins, Seth's normal and stable life gets shattered. He is Lalbag's richest man and the father of the protagonist, Ida. The invaders impose strict rules, their culture, food and social practices, and disrupt the local governance. Through these impacts India faces multicultural ideologies which collapses the normal life of the people in the society. The novel also portrays the similarities and differences between the two nations

(India and China). In one part of the novel the writer has talked about two types of Buddha through Mi Bingbing, a Chinese cop and pluralism through the character Manu, who responds,

“Madam Bingbing, believe you me, he is still one Buddha. Bodhi Dharma developed tea and kung-fu. It helped both nations. And caste is not a problem. Pluralism is the backbone of India. We don't force people to convert” (95), he says proudly to the Chinese cop.

It offers a rich blend of cultural, historical, and social commentary. He highlights India's pluralism and commitment to religious freedom, stating that India does not force people to convert.

Seth, Lalbag's richest man, whose business collapses and his family faces financial and emotional strain due to the betrayal of an agent, Kulhari, even the same country man couldn't help his people. Earlier he always says to his children that China will not attack Lalbag but later when the war started to show its reality his life drowns into hopelessness. Seth doesn't like to be pushed and pulled by others because of his status, the war has made him an equal among men. He struggles with his lost wealth and control over his family to rescue them from the Chinese cops and bomb. He has been suffering from rectal cancer, later he accepts the inevitability of death without getting any treatment because he believes that this is his predicament. Everyone in the town is getting sick, Dr. Daftari is the only person who remains busy, his consultations and treatment are unaffordable for all, exactly what China has planned. The Chinamen have taken experienced doctors and nurses to New China to provide affordable healthcare for their own people. The war brings an environment of uncertainty and fear, making it difficult to pursue their livelihood.

Ida and Manu are two major characters in Meghna Pant's novel *The Man Who Lost India*, who have a forbidden love affair. Their adversities and resilient nature show the personal side of the greater socio-political war between China and India. Ida, the protagonist, is a childish, but strong-willed and brave woman who encounters several obstacles. The war causes Ida to struggle with the loss of loved ones, which has a profound emotional and psychological impact on her. Ida has to deal with being uprooted from her home and losing her feeling of security as the Chinese incursion disrupts her town. For instance, she was haunted by the plunder of losing her best friends' family by Chinese soldiers and they took away her friend Nandini. Ida was married to Harsh, son of the second richest man of the town, who has NIC (National Identity Card) with him to remain on a safer side without getting into the trouble of China. But she was betrayed by her husband and her married life became an unhappy one, later rejoins with her lover, Manu.

Manu, a house help of Seth's family, faces both physical and mental trauma as a result of a war. This includes injuries, loss of Ida and the constant threat given by a Chinese cop to get the Shiva statue. His journey connects and parallels Ida's, offering another viewpoint on the novel's themes. The Black Taj, an unfulfilled mausoleum of Seth's ambition, is taken as a symbol of love, loss and peace, where they find comfort where Ida and Manu meet secretly at midnight. Ida's encounter with many types of inequality and social injustice strengthens her resolve to fight for a better future. She comes to the forefront to rescue her town and temple. Pant has captured not only the brutality of war but also the humanity of it. The way in which the author depicts the human spirit and the pursuit of justice and peace amid the issues of war via Seth, Ida and Manu gives the novel's examination of deeper socio-political concerns with emotional relevance.

The characters' struggle with depression, anxiety, and trauma are a reflection of the larger disruption to society and the rooted trauma brought on by conflict. This paper examines the effects of war on mental health, highlighting the significant and frequently disregarded human cost of such catastrophes. *The Man Who Lost India* provides a nuanced understanding of how socio-political issues affect mental well-being. In this novel no one finds peace, till the end everyone is scared by the Chinamen and war. The detailed depiction of the characters' psychological struggles fosters pity, empathy and gives awareness about the importance of mental health in the times of a war.

*The Man Who Lost India* is not just a story of war and survival but also a poignant exploration of the enduring quest for hope, identity and peace in the face of overwhelming adversity. At the end, Lalbag is being saved by a supernatural power that brings peace in the lives of the individual by incorporating Magic Realism as an escape mechanism and Pant narrates that Kaliyuga comes to an end and Satya Yuga begins. "For that is the way with war and peace." (305) is the last line of the novel. The novel starts with headlines of war and ends with a note of peace. Ida comes to the forefront to rescue her town from China. The novel provides readers with a deep knowledge of the difficulties involved in the formation of new nation consciousness through its wonderful narrative and compelling characters, making it a notable work in contemporary literature. Therefore, the application of Conflict Theory and analysis of the novel *The Man Who Lost India* not only enriches our understanding of Meghna Pant's work but also contributes to broader discussions on literature, conflict, and societal transformation. In order to overcome and to stop the consequences of war to get a better future, the novel suggests that every individual has to understand that cooperation will bring peace whereas competition will lead to war.

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# **DIVINE HEALING: EXPLORING THE THERAPEUTIC ASPECTS OF HINDU AND BUDDHIST RELIGIOUS TEXTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates the role of Hindu and Buddhist Scriptures in Mental Health Therapy. After a long study and with experience it is understood how one falls into the trap of depression. This paper is the understanding that if an individual is aware of their worth and has faith in themselves, they can fight through anxiety, loneliness, stress, and depression. Hindu and Buddhist scriptures offer a clear understanding of higher concepts of one's life and allow them to have a sense of realization about this materialistic world. These scriptures offer narratives that provide comfort, hope, and meaning, which can be crucial for individuals facing psychological distress. Both traditions emphasize mindfulness, ethical conduct, meditation, compassion, and profound philosophical insights, which collectively address mental health issues like stress, anxiety, and depression. This study highlights the aspects of therapeutic approaches through the regional scriptures.*

## **KEY WORDS**

*Mental Health Therapy, Hindu Scriptures, Buddhist Scriptures, Depression, Anxiety, Stress*

## **INTRODUCTION**

*"The wise see knowledge and action as one, they see truly and go beyond death"*

This quote from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad states that where one sees knowledge and action and understands the gist of it, it can transcend to eternity and beyond, as this has more power than anything in this world that is as priceless as knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge and wisdom allow an individual to think out of the box and put them into comfort. This paper talks about the main causes of mental distress and how Hindu and Buddhist scriptures act as therapeutic tools to come out of the holdings of negative energy (mental distress). Reading the traditional scriptures with the right understanding of their meaning enlightens an individual about reality and that everything except the spirit/soul is temporary. Doing this allows a person to feel connected to the universe by creating a sense of unity with nature. Just existing with the right thoughts and effort towards their work is all one must do without worrying about the outcome or perfection. By knowing the purpose of life, one will be able to slip through their worries with ease, this knowledge can be attained by reading the traditional scriptures with the right understanding of its meaning.

Hindu and Buddhist scriptures as sound therapy, the positive frequencies and vibrations produced by chanting mantras and sutras, reciting slokas, singing bhajans, and the music

produced by the combination of instruments used heals the damage done to the body and the soul due to external factors caused by this materialistic world such as mental distress.

Reading or chanting these mantras, sutras, and slokas multiple times works as a manipulative tool, positive manipulation enlightens the brain with self-awareness and develops self-esteem, bringing consciousness to the individual about the existence of eternal power (soul) within them. In simple words, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures serve as a direct and greater way of mental health therapy by simply letting an individual understand their greater purpose of existence.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The work "Religion-based interventions for mental health disorders a systematic review" by Kurhade, Chhaya Shantaram; Jagannathan, Aarti; Varambally, Shivarama; and Shivanna, Sushrutha. This is a survey-based paper that discusses the effects of mental health on religious scriptures from a variety of religions, including Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and others. The article also conducted a poll on persons suffering from mental health concerns, and through its systematic manner, it discovered that many people who suffer from mental illness find relief after reading their particular regional texts, such as a Buddhist who is suffering from depression. According to the text, there is a procedure that uses Buddhist Mindfulness skills to aid in the recovery from depression. These strategies include behaviours that help the person minimise depression while also ensuring that the condition does not return. This type of system is also evident in the paper mentioned here, which also tackles mental health difficulties and how Hindu and Buddhist Scriptures aid in the insights of knowledge that are diffused throughout a person's body and soul.

## **MENTAL DISTRESS AND ITS CAUSES**

Mental Distress encompasses various symptoms and experiences of a person's life that are commonly held to be troubling, confusing, or entirely non-ordinary. Causes of mental distress can vary widely from person to person. The following are some common causes:

1. Trauma
1. Personality and Low Self-Esteem
1. Stress
1. Social isolation
1. Experiencing Discrimination
1. Insecurity / Self-Doubt

## **HINDU SCRIPTURES AS MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY**

Hindu Scriptures are a traditional way of conveying moral living through various formats such as Mantras, Stotras, Sutras, Bhajans, Slokas, Vedas, Geetas, and many more. They are a beautiful and pleasant way of learning how life works.

### **What Hindu Scriptures say about these problems:**

#### **Trauma:**

The Bhagavad Gita, a sacred Hindu scripture, addresses the concept of trauma and mental distress through its teachings on the nature of the self, duty, and detachment. Although it does



not use the modern term “trauma”, it explains how to understand and cope with traumatic experiences.

**Vairagya (Detachment):**

“Detachment from outcomes: You have a right to perform your prescribed duties, but you are not entitled to the fruits of your actions. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, nor be attached to inaction.”(Bhagavad Gita 2.47)

**Practical Teachings in Hindu Slokas**

In many Hindu slokas, it is taught to detach from past and future, focusing instead on present actions and thoughts since life is all about the present and the present is what exists while the past has already happened and no longer falls into existence.

*For a person who has been forsaken by time, what use is there of great exertion? Time comes, and in time everything becomes possible.” (Mahabharata)*

"Kaalaaya Tasmai Namah;Kaalaaya Tasmai Namoh Namah" - A common Sloka that reminds us of the importance of the present.

**Personality and Low Self-Esteem:**

**Understanding the Divine Self:**

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says, when you are provided with such a powerful eternal energy called the Soul which does not have any shape, body or brain and it is without birth or death, what do you doubt yourself about while the true esteem lies within yourself just existing and holding this power. Abandon your attachment to the thought of ‘Success’ and ‘Failure’ which is after all set up by your false understanding through foolishness.

"The soul is neither born and nor does it ever die, nor having once existed, does it ever cease to be. The soul is without birth, eternal, immortal, and ageless. It is not destroyed when the body is destroyed." (Bhagavad Gita 2.20)

**Stress:**

**Equanimity (Samatva):**

*"Perform your duty with an even mind, O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment to success or failure. Such evenness of mind is called yoga."(BG 2.48)*

*"When meditation is mastered, the mind is unwavering like the flame of a lamp in a windless place." (BG 6.19)*

*"By thus engaging in self-discipline through mental control, the yogi attains the peace which culminates in the state of liberation, ultimate union with Me." (BG 6.15)*

Krishna says that when one practices keeping their mind in a stable condition and is consistent, he/she can do any work in peace. When one understands that the work he/she is doing is only being done in the present and is conscious about the present, they can do their work with ease, yet keep it in the back of their mind that nothing in this materialistic world really matters or exists forever.

**Social Isolation:**

**Verse 6.5:** *"One must deliver oneself with the help of one's mind, and not degrade oneself. The mind is the friend of the conditioned soul, and his enemy as well."*

**Verse 6.6:** *"For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, his very mind will be the greatest enemy."*

**Verse 6.19:** *"As a lamp in a windless place does not waver, so the transcendentalist, whose mind is controlled, remains always steady in his meditation on the transcendent self."*

### **Discrimination:**

Krishna says, that inside every individual, the same divine energy exists, later it depends on how one understands the worth of that divine energy within them. He also says, there is no difference in divine energy among different living beings, so then what is here to bother and bring such a thought if it's simply not one's stupidity?

*"The humble sage, by true knowledge, sees with equal vision a learned and gentle Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a dog-eater [outcast]." (BG 5.18)*

### **Non-Discrimination and Detachment: \_**

*"One who is not envious but is a kind friend to all living entities, who does not think himself a proprietor and is free from false ego, who is equal in both happiness and distress, who is tolerant, always satisfied, self-controlled, and engaged in devotional service with determination, his mind and intelligence fixed on Me - such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me." (BG 12.13-14)*

### **Insecurity / Self Doubt:**

Any work one does should be done with complete dedication, love (interest), and respect towards it which is what finishes the purpose of work ('just give your best'). There is no need to worry or care about the fruit that arises from it, Krishna (universe) shall take care of it.

1. *"Patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktya prayacchati, tad aham bhakti-upahritam asnami prayatatmanah."* (BG 9.26)

Translation: "If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water, I will accept it."

1. *"Na hi jnanena sadrusham pavitram iha vidyate, tat svayam yoga-samsiddhah kalenatmani vindati."* (BG 4.38)

Translation: "In this world, there is nothing so sublime and pure as transcendental knowledge. Such knowledge is the mature fruit of all mysticism. And one who achieved this enjoys the self within himself in time." Krishna says Nothing in this world is transcendental, nothing is great, nothing is minor. It is all about how you take it. One who understands this will stop caring about anything that is pulling them down.

## **HINDU SCRIPTURES AS SOUND THERAPY**

Sound therapy in Hinduism is deeply rooted in the spiritual and cultural practices of chanting mantras, reciting slokas, and singing bhajans. These activities are known to have profound therapeutic effects on the mind, body, and spirit. Chanting these scriptures helps an individual connect to their eternal self. The frequencies produced by these scriptures while singing help our body restore its ability to heal by creating a sense of unity with the universe.

**Popular mantra: OM (AUM):**

1. 'A' starts with an open mouth and resonates in the abdomen producing vibrations there.
1. 'U' travels to the chest with the vibrations traveling to the chest.
1. 'M' is produced by closing the lips allowing the sound and vibration to travel throughout the head.

**Mental Benefits of Chanting OM:**

1. **Promotes Mental Clarity:** Chanting "Om" can help clear the mind, improving focus and concentration.
1. **Enhances Emotional Stability:** Regular practice can help balance emotions, reducing anxiety and depression.
1. **Increases Mindfulness:** The practice encourages present-moment awareness, fostering a sense of mindfulness.
1. **Improves Sleep Quality:** The calming effects of chanting can help improve sleep patterns and promote deeper, more restful sleep.

**Spiritual Benefits of chanting OM:**

1. **Deepens Meditation:** Chanting "Om" can enhance meditation practices, helping practitioners reach deeper states of consciousness.
1. **Connects to Higher Consciousness:** "Om" is considered the primordial sound, representing the essence of the universe. Chanting can help individuals feel connected to a higher spiritual reality.
1. **Balances Chakras:** The vibrations from chanting "Om" can help balance the body's energy centers (chakras), promoting overall energetic harmony.
1. **Enhances Inner Peace:** Practice can foster a profound sense of inner peace and spiritual fulfillment.

**Physical benefits of chanting OM:**

1. **Reduces Stress:** The rhythmic chanting of "Om" can calm the nervous system, lowering stress levels and promoting relaxation.
1. **Improves Heart Health:** Chanting "Om" can help reduce blood pressure and improve heart rate variability, contributing to overall cardiovascular health.
1. **Enhances Respiratory Function:** The deep, slow breathing involved in chanting can improve lung capacity and function.
1. **Relieves Tension:** The vibrations from chanting "Om" can help relax muscles and reduce physical tension.

**Gayatri Mantra:**

It's a revoked vedic mantra that allows an individual to invoke the divine light within themselves. Chanting this mantra often benefits an individual with mental clarity, wisdom, and spiritual enlightenment.

**Slokas:**

Slokas are verses from sacred texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad Gita. Chanting slokas with the knowledge of meaning allows an individual to teach themselves the value of life and self-worth. It works as a manipulative tool for a spirit that's

feeling low. Chanting slokas repeatedly with the knowledge of meaning manipulates the mind with the understanding of how life works and gives them a sense of reality. Doing this can also develop self-worth and build confidence. The rhythm of singing these slokas lets the individual clear their mind and feel peaceful.

*"Sangachchhadhvam Samvadadhvam Sam Vo Manamsi Janatam" (Rig Veda 10.191.2)*

Meaning: Let us walk together, let us speak in one voice, let our minds be in harmony.

### **Bhajans and Keertans:**

Various instruments are used while playing bhajans. Playing these various instruments together at a time produces beautiful music releasing positive frequencies that put the mind at peace. Chanting the name of God and saluting all the great power he has given to us lets us realize the existence of power within us.

### **Chanting Mantras:**

Regular chanting of specific slokas and mantras can calm the mind and reduce stress.

1. *"Om Namah Shivaya"* – This mantra invokes the qualities of Lord Shiva, helping to dissolve stress and bring peace.
1. *"Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah"* (May all beings be happy) – This chant promotes universal well-being and peace.

Benefits of Slokas are attained only when read with knowledge of meaning, interest, trust, and concentration, indirectly helping an individual in gaining belief in themselves and better thought towards life.

### **In many Hindu Scriptures, one's body is compared with Nature. Here's how it is done:**

Nature is made of PANCHA BHUTAS (meaning - five great elements). They are: Bhoomi, Neeru, Agni, Vayuvu, Aakasham (Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, Sky).

How the body is compared with Pancha Bhutas:

1. Bhoomi - (Muuladhaaram) - Spinal Cord ( Gudha Bhagam).
1. Neeru - ( Manipurathatvam) - Lower Belly, Urinary Bladder.
1. Agni - ( Swadhistanam) - Acids present in the Stomach.
1. Vayuvu - (Vishuddhi Chakram) Windpipe.
1. Aakasham - (Aagnya Chakram)- In between eyebrows.
1. Sahastraakaara Chakram - Head (The Body's power is generated here).

Knowing this lets an individual mingle themselves with the universe by creating a sense of unity with nature. This feeling promotes self-esteem, self-worth, and satisfaction.

### **Difference between Body and Dead Body:**

The organs and the body parts of a body with life and a body without life are the same yet why is a dead body called dead? Due to lack of Movement (Chalanam), This is mentioned in Devi Stuthi:

*"Yaa Devi Sarva Bhuteshu /Cheta Netyabhi Dheeyathe/  
Namasthasyai Namasthasyai Namasthasyai Namoh Namah".*

Meaning - I'm saluting the power that has given movement and consciousness to every living being.

1. Vishnu Maayeti Shabdthitha – This world is filled with Vishnu Maaya. Nothing here is real. Everything is temporary.
2. Cheta Netyabhi Dheeyathe – Mentioned above.
3. Buddhi Ruupena Samsthitha – Common sense, Ability to think.
4. Nidra Ruupena Samsthitha – Importance of the right amount of rest.
5. Kshudha Ruupena Samsthitha – Hunger. Keeps the body active and conscious.
6. Chaaya Ruupena Samsthitha – Shadow. The feeling of being watched all the time by God (shadow). Excellent work or unpleasant work. Confidence and Fear.
7. Shakti – Power in You.
8. Trushna – Curiosity.
9. Kshanti – Excusing nature.
10. Jaathi – Respect every living being.
11. Ladja – Shame and guilt after making a mistake.
12. Shaanti – Peace of Mind.
13. Shraddha – Concentration on anything one does.
14. Kaanti – Enlightenment.
15. Lakshmi – Health and Wealth together give Lakshmi.
16. Vruthi – Respect one's work or their own.
17. Smruthi – Memory.
18. Daiya – Kindness and Compassion.
19. Thusti – Satisfaction.
20. Maatru – Respect every female.
21. Bhraanthi – This world is an illusion.

Devi Stuti is a constant chanting of the God/universe for providing us with all the benefits mentioned above. This allows an individual to manipulate their mind into being grateful for having these abilities.

## **BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES AS MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY**

Buddhist scriptures offer traditional and profound means of conveying moral and ethical living through various formats such as Suttas, Sutras, Gathas, Vinaya texts, and Abhidhamma. These sacred writings provide deep insights into the nature of life, suffering, and the path to enlightenment.

### **What Buddhist Scriptures say about these problems:**

*"Na hi verena verāni, sammantīdha kudācanaṃ; averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano."* (**Dhammapada 5**)

"Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone hatred is appeased. This is an eternal law." This verse teaches the value of compassion and forgiveness. It provides insights into how a person should be understanding and forgiving and should not return hate for hate.

*"Attanā hi kataṃ pāpaṃ, attanā saṅkilissati; attanā akataṃ pāpaṃ, attanā va visujjhati; suddhi asuddhi paccattaṃ, nāñño aññaṃ visodhaye."* (**Dhammapada 165**)

"By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one made pure. Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another."

This verse highlights the importance of individual effort in cultivating a positive self-image and personal growth. It talks about how a positive attitude can help a person change the way he/she perceives life. This change in attitude can help a person improve in terms of confidence and self-esteem.

*"Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā; manasā ce paduṭṭhena, bhāsati vā karoti vā, tato naṃ dukkhamanveti, cakkam va vahato padaṃ."* (**Dhammapada 1**)

*Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā; manasā ce pasannena, bhāsati vā karoti vā, tato naṃ sukhamanveti, chāyā va anapāyinī."* (**Dhammapada 2**)

"Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind, a person speaks or acts, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox. If with a pure mind, a person speaks or acts, happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow."

These verses highlight the importance of cultivating a pure mind to transform suffering into happiness. Having evil and impure thoughts can bring changes in the mental state of the person and suffering follows a person with such a mental state. The world will seem lifeless with a bad thought process. If a person with pure thoughts acts, then happiness will follow pursuit.

*"Diso disam yam tam kariya veri va pana verinam micchapanihitam cittam papiyo nam tato kare"* (**Dhammapada 42**)

"Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, or haters, one to another, far worse is the harm from one's own wrongly directed mind." This verse shows that our minds and thoughts can cause us more suffering than external factors, emphasizing the need for mental discipline and healing. The verse states that we don't need an enemy when we have a disturbed mind. Nothing is worse than the harm one suffers through his/her mind, not even the harm that an enemy would cause.

*"Pare ca na vijānanti maya meetha yamāmase, ye ca tattha vijānanti tato sammanti medhagā."* (**Dhammapada 6**)

"Many do not realize that we here must die. For those who realize this, quarrels end." This verse emphasizes the significance of understanding the temporary quality of life, which can help reduce stress by changing one's viewpoint. Knowing that life and the suffering that comes along with it is not permanent can change the way a person sees the problems in his/her life and can be less stressed about them and focus on important things.

*"Arogya paramā lābhā, santuṭṭhi paramā dhanam, vissāsaparamā ñātī, nibbānam paramam sukham."* (**Dhammapada 207**)

"Health is the highest gain. Contentment is the greatest wealth. A trusted friend is the best relative. Nibbana is the highest bliss." This verse explains the importance of prioritizing health and contentment to effectively cope with stress. The verse states that health and contentment are the greatest treasures one can possess. A friend who can be trusted well is the greatest relative and Nibbana (Nirvana) is the greatest form of happiness that one can experience.

*"Yodha pūrakkhataṃ kammantaṃ Atisitaṃ byapagatassa cetasaṃ Āraddhaviriyaṃ pahitattaṃ Tamahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ."* (**Dhammapada 305**)

"If one finds no companion who is better or equal, let one resolutely pursue a solitary course; there is no fellowship with the fool." This verse highlights the significance of opting for solitude instead of being around negative or unhelpful individuals. If an individual does not find a companion that has equal thinking and a positive attitude, then one can choose to isolate oneself from such people and focus on his/her happiness.

*"Na paresaṃ vilomāni, na paresaṃ katākataṃ; attano va avekkheyya, katāni akatāni ca."* (**Dhammapada 50**)

"Let no one deceive another or despise anyone anywhere, or through anger or irritation wish for another to suffer." This verse advocates for non-violence and appreciation for all creatures, discouraging discrimination and ill-will. As humans, we don't have the right to violate the laws of nature and harm living beings around us. We are not entitled to causing harm and discriminating and ill-treating people. We must not act upon our anger and irritation and wish for another individual to suffer.

*"Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā, sabbe sattā averā hontu, abyāpajjā hontu, anīghā hontu, sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu."* (**Metta Sutta (Pali)**)

"May all beings be happy; may all beings be without disease. May all beings experience the sensation of auspiciousness. May nobody suffer in any way." This universal wish for the well-being of all beings highlights the principle of non-discrimination and compassion. It states that we must never discriminate between any living beings and wish for the well-being and prosperity of all. Nobody should experience any suffering. Every individual should wish for this, and it will result in universal harmony.

## **SOUND THERAPY IN BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES**

Sound therapy is a vital element in many spiritual and healing traditions around the world, such as Buddhism. Sound is often used in Buddhist practices to improve concentration, promote meditation, and aid in healing. By chanting mantras, reciting sutras, and using musical instruments such as Tibetan singing bowls, the resulting sounds can have deep healing effects on the mind, body, and spirit. These help individuals establish a connection with their inner being and foster overall wellness.

## **Repetitive Phrases and Singing**

1. **Mantras:** Chanting mantras is a widespread activity in Buddhism. Mantras are considered spiritual and healing powers and are made up of sacred syllables or phrases. Chanting mantras like "Om Mani Padme Hum" aids in concentrating the mind, alleviating stress, and fostering inner tranquility.

1. **Recitations:** Buddhist recitations are rhythmic repetitions of scriptures, prayers, or mantras. Chanting is believed to produce vibrations that align with the body's energy points, supporting both physical and spiritual well-being.

## **Musical Instruments**

**Tibetan Singing Bowls:** These are musical instruments from Tibet known for producing harmonious sounds when struck or rubbed with a mallet.

1. **Auditory Vibrations:** When hit or rubbed with a mallet, Tibetan singing bowls emit sounds and vibrations. It is thought that these sounds possess healing properties, aiding in harmonizing the body's energy, lessening stress, and improving meditation techniques.

1. **Zen Helper:** The peaceful sounds from the bowls can enhance meditation, guiding individuals toward a calm and aware state.

Bell and Dorje (Vajra) are a pair of ritual objects.

1. **Meaning and Function:** In Tibetan Buddhism, the bell (ghanta) and dorje (vajra) are utilized simultaneously in ceremonies. The bell is a symbol of wisdom, while the Dorje represents compassion. The noises made while using them in ceremonies are believed to connect practitioners with these attributes and aid in spiritual recovery.

## **Prayer Wheels**

These are devices used for spinning mantras, typically containing sacred texts.

1. **Audio and Vibration:** Rotating prayer wheels that hold scrolls with written mantras are thought to unleash the spiritual energy of the mantras into the universe. Spinning the wheels while chanting can generate a calming and therapeutic atmosphere.

1. **Ritual Usage:** Gongs and drums are often used in Buddhist ceremonies and rituals. It is believed that their profound, reverberating tones help eliminate negativity, enhance concentration, and show a sacred environment for meditation and prayer.

## **The Sounds of Nature and Periods without Noise**

1. **Incorporation of Natural Sounds:** Buddhists commonly integrate natural sounds like running water, bird chirping, and wind into their meditation routines. These natural noises can aid in soothing the mind and improving the meditative journey.

1. **Silence:** Practicing noble quietness, and refraining from speaking, helps individuals to be more aware of subtle sounds inside and around them, leading to enhanced meditation and self-awareness.

## **POPULAR MANTRA: OM MANI PADME HUM**

The mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" is widely recognized in Buddhism. It is linked to the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara.

### **The Sounds of Om Mani Padme Hum:**



1. The sound 'Om' symbolizes the practitioner's physical, verbal, and mental aspects evolving into the enlightened body, speech, and mind of a Buddha.
1. The term 'Mani' represents a precious object, representing aspects of technique, kindness, and affection.
1. 'Padme' signifies wisdom as it represents the lotus flower.
1. The sound 'Hum' symbolizes being undivided, showing oneness and clarity.

### **Healing Aspects of Sound in Buddhism:**

1. **Mind-Body Connection:** Sound therapy in Buddhism recognizes the connection between the mind and body. The vibrations from sound can help to release physical and emotional blockages, promoting overall well-being.
1. **Stress Reduction:** The soothing sounds used in Buddhist practices can help to reduce stress and anxiety, creating a sense of peace and relaxation.
1. **Spiritual Healing:** Sound therapy is also used to aid in spiritual healing, helping practitioners to connect with their inner selves, enhance their spiritual growth, and achieve a sense of enlightenment.

### **Mental Benefits of Chanting Om Mani Padme Hum:**

1. **Enhances Mental Clarity:** Reciting this mantra can clear the mind, leading to better focus and concentration.
1. **Improves Emotional Stability:** Consistent practice can help regulate emotions, decreasing anxiety and promoting feelings of compassion.
1. **Promotes Mindfulness: Engages individuals in being present, cultivating a mindful attitude.**
1. **Enhances Sleep Quality:** Chanting's soothing effects can enhance sleep patterns and encourage deeper, more restful rest.
1. **Decreases Anxiety:** Vibrations can reduce anxiety and enhance emotional stability.

### **Physical Benefits:**

1. **Decreases Stress:** Reciting "Om Mani Padme Hum" in a rhythmic manner can soothe the nervous system, reducing stress and encouraging relaxation.
1. **Chanting:** It can enhance heart health by lowering blood pressure and enhancing heart rate variability, which benefits cardiovascular well-being.
1. **Improves Breathing Function:** Chanting involves deep and slow breathing which can enhance lung ability and function.
1. **Eases Stress:** Chanting vibrations can ease muscle tension and alleviate physical pain by promoting relaxation.
1. **Balanced Energy:** Utilizing sound waves to create equilibrium in the body's energy systems, promoting overall physical health.

### **Spiritual Benefits:**

1. **Symbolic Harmony:** The combining of the bell and dorje represents the coming together of wisdom and compassion, which are crucial for spiritual development.
1. Chanting vibrations aid in balancing the body's energy centers (chakras), leading to increased overall energetic harmony.

1. **Spiritual Alignment:** The vibrations generated assist in aligning the individual with spiritual attributes, encouraging inner harmony.

1. **Improves Meditation:** The soothing sounds from the bowls help enhance meditation by creating a peaceful and mindful state for practitioners.

Incorporating Sound therapy from Buddhist scriptures and practices into modern therapeutic settings can result in a well-rounded and peaceful existence, addressing mental, physical, and spiritual health.

## **HOW HINDU AND BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES ARE SIMILAR IN MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY**

### **1. Mindfulness and Meditation:**

#### **Hindu Scriptures:**

Equanimity and Presence:

"Yoga is equanimity of mind" (**Chapter 2, Verse 48**)

Meaning: this phrase from Bhagavad Gita says that maintaining mental peace is an essential part of life. Maintaining mental stability and balance in all circumstances should be a core aspect of mindfulness which allows a person to do the work the right way.

"When the five senses are at rest, together with the mind, and when the intellect ceases to be active: that they call the highest state." (Katha Upanishad 2.3.10-1)

Meaning: This phrase from Katha Upanishad says that while meditating the five senses of the body go to rest together, the higher self ceases to be active, importing all the energy to the within. This realizes the unity of the individual soul with the universal soul, healing the damage done to the internal being.

#### **Buddhist Scriptures:**

There are four foundations of mindfulness mentioned in Buddhist scriptures. They are:

1. Mindfulness of the Body (Kaya)
1. Mindfulness of Feelings (Vedana)
1. Mindfulness of the Mind (Citta)
1. Mindfulness of Dhammas (Phenomena)

These four foundations of mindfulness allow a person to observe their body and physical sensations, noticing pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings, it makes them aware of their mental state such as joy, anger, or calmness.

Samatha and Vipassana Meditation:

Samatha (calm-abiding meditation): aims to develop deep concentration and makes the higher self-active by focusing on a single object such as breath, mantra, or a visual object.

Vipassana (insight meditation): aims to cultivate insight into the feelings of a person by deeply observing the arising and passing away of thoughts, sensations, and emotions leading to an understanding of suffering, impermanence, and non-self.

### **2. Ethical living and mental purity:**

#### **Hindu Scriptures:**

Ethical living (Dharma):

Yamas and Niyamas (Patanjali's Yoga Sutras):

Yamas:

1. Ahimsa - Non-violence
1. Satya - Truthfulness
1. Asteya - non-stealing
1. Brahmacharya - Celibacy or moderation
1. Aparigraha - non-possessiveness

Niyamas :

1. Shaucha - Purity
1. Santosha - Contentment
1. Tapas - Austerity
1. Svadhyaya - Self-study
1. Ishvara Pranidhana - Surrender to God

"Therefore, without attachment, perform always the work that has to be done; for a man, engaged in work without attachment, attains the Supreme." (**Bhagavad Gita Chapter 3, Verse 19**)

Meaning - This phrase from Bhagavad Gita says that a person who does his work without being worried about the outcome and completely dedicates himself to the work, in the present will achieve the greatest outcome of all.

### **Buddhist Scriptures:**

Ethical Living (Sila):

The Noble Eightfold Path:

1. Right View (Samma Ditthi)
1. Right Intention (Samma Sankappa)
1. Right Speech (Samma Vaca)
1. Right Action (Samma Kammanta)
1. Right Livelihood (Samma Ajiva)
1. Right Effort (Samma Vayama)
1. Right Mindfulness (Samma Sati)
1. Right Concentration (Samma Samadhi)
1. Mental purity by The Jhanas (Meditative Absorptions)

In Buddhist scriptures, it is mentioned in Samannaphala Sutta (Digha Nikaya 2) that by practicing Jhanas one can go into deep states of meditative absorption that lead to profound tranquility and insight.

### **3. Detachment and Acceptance:**

#### **Hindu Scriptures:**

It is mentioned in Bhagavad Gita chapter 5, verse 10:

"One who performs his duty without attachment, surrendering the results unto the Supreme Lord, is unaffected by sinful action, as the lotus leaf is untouched by water."

Meaning: This phrase from the Bhagavad Gita says that just as the leaf of a lotus flower floats in water the upper surface of the leaf remains untouched by the water the same way a person shall give his best to the work but not be affected by the outcome of it, if the work is truthful the outcome shall be effective.

It is mentioned in chapter 2, verse 14:

"O son of Kunti, the nonpermanent appearance of happiness and distress, and their disappearance in due course, are like the appearance and disappearance of winter and summer seasons. They arise from sense perception, and one must learn to tolerate them without being disturbed."

Meaning:

The feeling of happiness and distress are like the appearance and disappearance of seasons. They arise from temporary sense perception. One must understand that one should not rely on these temporary changes and must learn to tolerate and accept them without letting them affect them.

### **Buddhist Scriptures:**

#### **Detachment:**

Mentioned in four noble truths:

1. Dukha - Life is unsatisfactory and it must be accepted.
1. Samudaya - The cause of Dukha is the craving for attachment.
1. Nirodha - Detachment from craving sets an individual free from Dukha.
1. Magga - The eightfold path is the way to achieve detachment and end suffering.

#### **Acceptance:**

1. Clinging to the impermanent leads to suffering.
1. Dukkha - accept suffering as a part of life and find the path to liberation.
1. Brahmaviharas - development of equanimity as a means to achieve mental peace.
1. Anatta - acceptance of truth leads to the release of ego and attachment.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this paper discusses the therapeutic benefits of Hindu and Buddhist Scriptures by letting an individual understand the deeper meaning of life. Knowing self-worth and being aware of the eternal energy (soul) existing within lets an individual think of themselves as important and worthy, which develops confidence and consciousness. Understanding that everything is temporary, the soul will let the individual detach from greed and stop the craving for attachment. Exploring mental distress in Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, there has been a deep understanding of the human mind. Both customs highlight the importance of ethical behavior, self-awareness, and mindfulness for achieving mental wellness. Texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and Pali Canon provide answers to mental and emotional pain using ideas such as Dharma, Karma, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path. Mantras and Slokas highlighting mental challenges have been explained, portraying the therapeutic value of these texts. The healing benefits of sound using various instruments and chants are acknowledged as well. The universality of mental challenges is emphasized by striking similarities between the texts, showing the potential to combine ancient practices with modern approaches for overall well-being.

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## THE PITFALLS OF ENVISIONING PARENTHOOD THROUGH A ROMANTIC LENS IN PASANGA 2

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### ABSTRACT

*Media plays a pivotal role in our daily life. As a major source of information, media is considered to be as most trusted medium by the commoners. Sometimes this trust has been broken by them by spreading fake information. Pregnancy and the life after the pregnancy are one of such events. In most of the films, pregnancy has been portrayed by hiding the risks, pain and after effects of pregnancy. Filmmakers believe that if they consider such scenes in the film, they should have to provide proper explanation to such scenes. The primary aim of this paper is to break romanticized version of pregnancy presented by the filmmakers and to open the exact state of postpartum depression. Here we have selected the film Pasanga 2 directed by Pandiraj which has been released in the year 2015 as a reference for this paper. Through this paper we intent to break the conventional ideas about the mental health of both father and mother during the period of pregnancy.*

### KEYWORDS

*Postpartum depression, Pregnancy, Pasanga 2, Media, Mental health*

### INTRODUCTION

Media plays a pivotal role in our daily life. They have been considered as a major medium of communication. It includes the conventional mediums of information and education; such as newspaper, television, radio, pamphlets, films and also social media. In recent period, the influence of media has increased humongously in all over the world. Apart from its major features, media also has an opposite side too. As a major source of information, media is considered to be as most trusted medium by the commoners. Sometimes this trust has been broken by them by spreading fake information. The wide reach feature of media can spread this information in a short period of time to every corner of the world. This can create a false image on the audience about that particular event.

Pregnancy and the life after the pregnancy are one of such events. In most of the films, pregnancy has been portrayed by hiding the risks, pain and after effects of pregnancy. Filmmakers believe that if they consider such scenes in the film, they should have to provide proper explanation to such scenes. So they mainly focus on the romanticized part of pregnancy, the birth of the child

and their growth. This can create a false image on the newly married couple about the pregnancy. The experiences of different people might vary greatly, resulting in a range of distress levels and distinct social and therapeutic consequences. One of such consequences of pregnancy is postpartum depression (PPD); this has been unfortunately misunderstood by most of the people. Postpartum depression affects both mother and father differently. PPD is marked by persistent sadness, anxiety, and fatigue, often making it difficult for mothers to bond with their babies, accompanied by feelings of hopelessness. In case of fathers, approximately 10% of new dads experience postpartum depression, often remaining unnoticed due to societal norms that suggest men should be strong and supportive. Their state of life will turn to another level after pregnancy. Some of them cannot handle this stage of life without proper consultancy from the experts and this can also lead to crimes too.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The term "media" refers to a variety of widely disseminated forms of information, including digital platforms like social media and websites as well as more conventional ones like radio, television, and newspapers. Its primary goals are to enlighten, amuse, and shape public opinion. The media, in all its manifestations, has a profound impact on public opinion, cultural standards, and personal conduct. This impact can have beneficial effects like enlightening and educating the public, but it can also have unfavourable effects like social isolation and the propagation of false information. In order to manage the media's influence on society and promote responsible consumption, it is essential to comprehend its role.

Social media's ascent has changed the media landscape by enabling people to produce and share information in addition to consuming it. This combined function has the potential to spread false information more quickly and widely and to create "echo chambers," where people are only exposed to viewpoints that support their own. Media literacy, or the capacity to assess and critically analyze media content, has grown in significance in today's media-rich environment. By enabling people to separate reliable information from skewed or deceptive narratives, this skill set promotes an educated and involved society.

There are several serious risks associated with media use, including the dissemination of false information, exposure to violence, and social isolation. These drawbacks, especially for heavy users including teenagers and youngsters, can result in mental health problems and societal mistrust. The rise in inadequacies among users is one of the biggest problems; they frequently compare themselves to the idealized representations of others, which cause worry and low self-esteem. The fear of missing out (FOMO) makes this situation worse by forcing users to stay online all the time, creating a vicious loop of obsessive behaviour that might interfere with day-to-day activities. Social media may also be a venue for cyber-bullying, which exposes people to harassment and isolation and raises feelings of loneliness and melancholy. Even while social media platforms are meant to foster connection, research suggests that excessive use of these platforms might result in social isolation and a decline in the calibre of interpersonal connections. Furthermore, social media use has been linked to detrimental effects like disturbed sleep and decreased academic performance, making users' well-being even more complicated.

Mental health is a fundamental human right that is essential to the development of the individual, the community, and the socioeconomic system. Crucially, mental health is a diverse continuum that differs from person to person and includes more than just the absence of mental diseases.

The experiences of different people might vary greatly, resulting in a range of distress levels and distinct social and therapeutic consequences. Mental health issues include not just psychosocial disabilities and mental disorders, but also other mental states that can lead to significant suffering, interfere with day-to-day functioning, or raise the risk of self-harm. While it's true that people with mental health issues often report decreased mental well-being, this isn't always the case.

Social media, especially among teenagers and youngsters, can help people connect and find support, but it can also exacerbate conditions like anxiety, sadness, and low self-esteem. It is crucial to comprehend this dynamic in order to promote responsible use and healthy online environments. Research shows that frequent usage of social media is linked to these unfavourable effects, especially for youngsters. Because users are exposed to well chosen depictions of other people's lives, this kind of atmosphere can exacerbate stress and feelings of inadequacy. The problem of social comparison, in which people evaluate their own lives in light of the romanticized images they come across online, is one of the main causes for concern. Users may feel inadequate and poor in self-esteem as a result of this, believing they fall short. Constantly seeing other people's highlights might cause mental health problems to worsen and alter one's sense of oneself.

The postpartum period, often referred to as the "fourth trimester," is a vital time for new parents, characterized by considerable physical, emotional, and psychological changes. Mental health during this phase is essential for overall well-being, as the transition into parenthood can be a mix of joy and overwhelm. Many parents face the challenge of adjusting to new responsibilities, shifts in relationships, and the physical demands of newborn care. These adjustments can sometimes lead to mental health issues, which, if not addressed, may have enduring effects on both the parent and child.

One of the most recognized mental health disorders associated with postpartum is postpartum depression (PPD), which affects about 10-20% of women after giving birth. PPD is marked by persistent sadness, anxiety, and fatigue, often making it difficult for mothers to bond with their babies, accompanied by feelings of hopelessness. Another prevalent condition is postpartum anxiety, characterized by excessive worry and fear regarding the baby's health and safety.

Fathers also encounter mental health challenges during this period, although these issues are not as widely acknowledged. Approximately 10% of new dads experience postpartum depression, often remaining unnoticed due to societal norms that suggest men should be strong and supportive. Fathers may grapple with feelings of inadequacy, stress, and anxiety about their new roles, alongside emotional detachment from both the mother and the baby. The mental health of fathers during the postpartum period is crucial, as it can significantly impact family dynamics and the child's development.

To effectively address mental health during the postpartum period, a comprehensive approach is necessary, incorporating early screening, robust support systems, and access to mental health services. Promoting open communication between partners, educating them about postpartum mental health issues, and ensuring both parents have the necessary resources can help alleviate the risks associated with this time. By prioritizing mental well-being during the postpartum phase, we can foster healthier outcomes for parents, infants, and families as a whole.

Social media can have a significant impact on new parents during the postpartum phase, which is a crucial period of transition. Social media can be a source of connections and support, but it can also present problems that could make problems like postpartum anxiety and negative body



image worse. It is essential to comprehend these dynamics in order to encourage more positive online interactions and to assist the mental health of mothers.

Postpartum depression in fathers is commonly characterized by emotional disengagement, ongoing melancholy, fluctuations in weight or appetite, agitation, and trouble interacting with others. PPD symptoms are typically more severe and persistent than baby blues, which pass quickly after birth and call for thorough evaluation and treatment. Interestingly, a major risk factor is the mother's contemporaneous experience of postpartum depression, which might raise the father's risk of PPD by 50%. The history of depression, financial strain, strained relationships, and hormonal changes that can happen during the postpartum period are additional contributing factors. Because mental health concerns in males are stigmatized and there is a lack of understanding, male postpartum depression frequently remains undetected. A lot of males do not report their symptoms, and mental health evaluations for men after childbirth are often ignored by healthcare professionals. In order to properly address any signs of postpartum depression, it is imperative that healthcare providers and new fathers foster open communication. Similar to the methods used for women with PPD, therapy and medication are often combined in the treatment of postpartum depression in men. Popular treatment options include cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy; medication, such as antidepressants, is taken into consideration based on an individual's needs. Exercise, a balanced diet, and mindfulness exercises are examples of self-help techniques that can greatly reduce symptoms and enhance wellbeing.

Postpartum depression (PPD), which affects between 10–20% of new moms, is a serious mental health risk for women after childbirth. The mother's and her child's wellbeing depend on early detection and treatment. Within four weeks of giving birth, postpartum depression can set in. Constant melancholy, worry, exhaustion, impatience, mood swings, difficulties connecting with the infant, and thoughts of harming oneself or the infant are among the symptoms. The ability of a mother to care for herself and her child and to function in daily life might be severely hindered by these symptoms.

Postpartum depression can develop for a variety of reasons. One important impact is hormonal shifts, such as the sharp declines in progesterone and oestrogen levels after childbirth. PPD is more likely to occur as a result of these hormone changes, the physical strain of childbirth, and the emotional strain of raising an infant. A history of depression, a lack of social support system, and going through stressful life events are additional hazards. The "baby blues," which are milder emotions that many new moms encounter, usually consist of mood swings, anxiety, and melancholy that pass a few days to two weeks after giving birth. Postpartum depression symptoms, on the other hand, are more severe, persistent, and frequently necessitate medical attention. While postpartum depression (PPD) can seriously impair daily functioning and maternal health, the baby blues typically do not prohibit a mother from working efficiently.

Therapy, medication, and social support are often used in conjunction for effective treatment of postpartum depression. Support groups, therapy, and antidepressants can help control symptoms and enhance mental health. Treatments like the injectable drug brexanolone, which is given under medical supervision, may be considered in more severe cases. Changes in lifestyle, such as getting more sleep, eating a healthier diet, and asking friends and family for support, can also be helpful. It's critical that new mothers who exhibit postpartum depression symptoms get treatment as soon as possible. Untreated PPD can result in long-term problems for the mother and the child, such as a mother with chronic mental health concerns and a kid with developmental delays and

reduced bonding. During the postpartum phase, women can promote better mental and physical health outcomes for their families as well as for themselves.

Through the lens of postpartum period, this paper tries to analyse the romantic portrayal of parenthood through the life of Thamizh Nadan and his wife Venba in the movie 2015 released Tamil movie *Pasanga 2*, directed by Pandiraj. This paper only focuses on their life because this particular section of the movie was so popular that it received about 319k views in the YouTube. As the movie focus the film focuses on the issue of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) amongst children, it romanticize parenthood through the character of Thamizh Nadan acted by Surya and his wife Venba, acted by Amala Paul.

Romantic manifestation of this period creates a false notion in the minds of young couples. Media (film) romanticization of postpartum depression (PPD) can have a number of detrimental effects on new parents, their families, and society at large. These representations may lessen the severity of the illness, reinforce stigma, and influence the actions of individuals who are afflicted in terms of seeking assistance. It is crucial to comprehend these drawbacks in order to promote a more truthful conversation about mother mental health. Romantizing postpartum depression frequently results in the disorder's trivialization, portraying it as a passing inconvenience as opposed to a significant mental health problem. This may further the stigma associated with mental health issues, making it more challenging for women to ask for assistance or have honest conversations about their difficulties. Media narratives that portray post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a glamorous or romantic battle run the risk of downplaying the agony and loneliness that many moms endure, further alienating those who are already struggling.

The exclusion of the postpartum phase from films has a number of negative effects on society's conceptions of parenthood, mental health, and body image. Movies that don't fairly portray the difficulties faced by new parents might raise false expectations, exacerbate feelings of inadequacy, and reinforce the stigma associated with mental health problems in parents. Movies sometimes depict new moms' experiences inaccurately, glossing over the realities of the postpartum period. Filmmakers set an unattainable bar that many moms fall short of by presenting parenting as a seamless transition, which can cause emotions of inadequacy and failure. These representations downplay the difficulties in recuperating from childbirth, such as the physical discomfort, psychological difficulties, and significant life adjustments that come with becoming a mother. The way that fatherhood is portrayed in the media has a big impact on how society views fathers and family dynamics. Stereotypical representations, which sometimes show dads as uncaring or inept, might distort reality and lessen the significance of paternal roles. To promote more realistic portrayals of fatherhood and healthier family environments, it is imperative to recognize these distortions.

Fathers' roles within the family are portrayed in the media as emotionally detached individuals, which leads to a limited and distorted perception of them. The idea that males are less adept caregivers and providers is reinforced by shows that frequently highlight the hilarious inadequacy of fathers while praising more capable maternal figures. This representation undervalues the variety of realities that fathers today represent in addition to oversimplifying the difficulties of modern fatherhood. The negative portrayal of fathers can have far-reaching consequences for family dynamics. Relationship tensions between father and child and a decline in regard for the father's position might result from children growing up believing that fathers are unimportant or silly. In addition to discouraging fathers from being actively involved in their children's life, this

dynamic may also heighten feelings of inadequacy in fathers who do want to be involved and perpetuate a cycle of disengagement.

The idea that motherhood is generally a happy experience is perpetuated when movies neglect to show problems like postpartum depression or anxiety, marginalizing the perspectives of women who encounter mental health concerns at this time. This omission may deter moms from asking for assistance out of fear of being judged or from feeling alone in their challenges. Movies might perpetuate negative stereotypes about motherhood by excluding talk of the postpartum period. Reluctance to depict postpartum life realistically promotes illusions about the rarity or abnormality of conditions like postpartum depression, depriving society of vital conversations about these pressing concerns.

Ignoring the postpartum period can lead to a society where new moms feel under pressure to live up to an unrealistic image of parenting, which is also bad for their mental health. A lack of realistic portrayal of postpartum difficulties can leave newlyweds unprepared for the realities of life following childbirth. Relatively few real-life examples of postpartum recuperation have been shown to new parents, so they might not be prepared for the mental, physical, and practical obstacles they would encounter. This lack of planning can make an already challenging period even more stressful and anxious, making it even harder for families to get through this stage of life successfully.

Audiences may be misled about the reality of PPD by romanticized media portrayals of the disorder. These narratives have the potential to conceal the crippling symptoms of postpartum depression, which include acute anxiety, hopelessness, and emotional detachment that many women experience by portraying it as a source of artistic inspiration or emotional depth. This misrepresentation can lead to inflated expectations about what it means to be a mother by implying that having PPD is a normal part of the journey rather than a serious illness that needs to be treated. People who identify with media representations may underreport their symptoms because they think the representations do not adequately capture the severity or validity of their experiences. In addition, the romanticization of suffering in society can create a culture in which mothers believe they have to bear their suffering in silence rather than asking for help and therapy.

Romantic depictions of postpartum depression may contribute to a lack of awareness of the necessity of treatment for individuals experiencing the condition. Certain narratives have the ability to minimize the perceived need for professional assistance, including counselling and medication, by portraying PPD as a purely aesthetic or profound emotional occurrence. This can have serious long-term effects on the general well-being of mothers and their offspring as well as the developmental health of the latter. In the end, romanticizing postpartum depression may have detrimental effects on a mother's and her child's health. Suffering over extended periods of time might prevent mothers from developing a strong attachment with their children and from carrying out their parental responsibilities.

New moms experiencing postpartum depression (PPD) may experience severe psychological effects, including occasional criminal activity, especially in severe situations such as infanticide. Comprehending the correlation between postpartum depression and criminal activity is vital for optimizing legal defence strategies and guaranteeing that moms have the essential assistance and encouragement. It is acknowledged that postpartum depression is a mental health illness that may affect a mother's conduct. In extreme circumstances, it could appear as postpartum psychosis, which has been linked to strange actions like infanticide. Postpartum depression has been used

as a defence in murder trials in about 18 cases in the United States, demonstrating the seriousness of this illness.

Maternity blues, postnatal tiredness, postnatal depression, and puerperal psychosis are the four main phases of postpartum depression. Although the majority of women only have moderate symptoms in the early stages, puerperal psychosis is a serious and occasionally deadly condition that can result in destructive behaviours, such as crimes against children. Postpartum mental disorder, especially severe forms of PPD, has been acknowledged by courts as a valid defence in criminal cases. This acknowledgement by the court points to an expanding body of knowledge on the influence that a mother's mental health can have on her behaviour, especially in the critical postpartum phase. Experts in law predict that postpartum depression will become more widely accepted as a legitimate insanity defence in court, opening the door to a more complex administration of justice.

Remarkably, no past history of mental illness is present in 50% of women who commit crimes motivated by postpartum mood disorders. This figure highlights the serious consequences that postpartum disorders can have, underscoring the importance of screening and education for new moms in general and those who are experiencing extreme emotional distress in particular after giving birth. It is imperative to treat postpartum depression in order to avert possible criminal consequences. The dangers of untreated mental illness can be reduced by raising awareness of PPD and creating stronger support networks for new moms<sup>36</sup>. In addition to assisting women in overcoming the difficulties of motherhood, providing sufficient mental health resources can also protect the wellbeing of their families and children.

Postpartum depression (PPD) and criminality in newlywed fathers pose a complicated and worrisome combination. While PPD is commonly linked to mothers, new research shows that fathers may also face serious mental health difficulties in the postpartum phase, which in severe situations may result in criminal activity. Addressing the underlying mental health concerns is critical in order to avert potentially detrimental consequences for fathers and their families. Within a year of giving birth, 8% to 10% of new fathers are found to have postpartum depression; symptoms often appear three to six months after delivery. Nonetheless, some research indicates that among some father groups, the prevalence may reach 30%, suggesting that the mental health issues related to becoming a new parent are frequently underreported and under-diagnosed. Postpartum depression in fathers might manifest in ways different from what is usually seen in moms. Instead of overt melancholy, these can include increased irritation, emotional detachment, and avoidant behaviours. Aggression is an example of symptoms that can arise. These behaviours can exacerbate tensions within the family and, in extreme circumstances, lead to conflict or even criminal activity. Postpartum depression in dads has been associated with a number of risk variables, such as a partner's mental health, financial stress, social support gaps, and a history of mental illness. These risk factors can increase the likelihood of poor mental health outcomes by creating a stressful environment. This could result in behaviours that harm family relationships or encourage criminal activity.

A father's capacity to perform well in the family setting can be severely impacted by untreated postpartum depression, which may result in abusive or neglectful actions against partners or children. There is a complicated link between criminal activity and mental health problems; in severe situations, untreated PPD can result in acts of infanticide or, unfortunately, domestic violence. To reduce these dangers, awareness and action are essential. It's crucial to identify the symptoms of postpartum depression in fathers and offer the right kind of assistance in order to

stop any criminal behaviour. During pediatric visits, interventions should include checking new fathers for mental health problems and offering services like counselling and support groups. By taking care of these mental health issues, families can enhance their general well-being and lessen the chance of unfavourable results. Finally, it should be noted that treating postpartum depression in fathers is essential for their mental health as well as the security and welfare of their families. Entire support networks and education campaigns can help reduce the dangers of PPD, possibly averting criminal activity and promoting happier, more stable homes.

Tragically, postpartum depression (PPD) and domestic violence often coexist in cases when parents kill their children. These occurrences frequently arise from serious mental health issues that go untreated, which has terrible effects on communities and families. Raising awareness of the significance of mental health support during the postpartum period requires an understanding of these circumstances. Lindsay Clancy, a mother from Massachusetts who is accused of killing her three small children in January 2023, is one prominent example. At the time of the occurrence, Clancy was reportedly experiencing severe psychological turmoil and was diagnosed with postpartum depression. The case garnered national attention and brought to light the stigma associated with mental health disorders among mothers. It also underscored the pressing need for efficient treatment and support networks for recently arrived mothers with mental health problems. The story of Andrea Yates, who drowned her five children in their bathtub in Texas in 2001, is another well-known example. Yates's defence team claimed that her past history of severe postpartum depression and psychosis was a factor in her behaviour. She was found not guilty by reason of insanity in 2006 after her initial murder conviction was overturned. Yates' terrible story serves as a reminder of the difficulties associated with mental illness, the significance of comprehending postpartum conditions, and the potential legal ramifications for parents who are experiencing extreme psychological distress<sup>1</sup>.

The movie *Pasanga 2* mostly overlooks the difficulties of the postpartum phase, although Thamizh Nadan and Venba's portrayals of parenthood are picture-perfect. The difficulties that newlyweds frequently encounter, such as their physical recuperation, their emotional strain, or their risk of developing postpartum depression, are not depicted in the movie. The film offers an imperfect and romanticized picture of what it means to be a new parent by emphasizing the positive parts of parenthood and ignoring the challenges of the postpartum phase. This omission may cause real-life parents to have irrational expectations and feel alone or unprepared when they encounter these difficulties.

The absence of attention paid to Venba's postpartum recuperation is one noteworthy instance in *Pasanga 2*. The birth of their children is swiftly followed by scenes of a contented family, and the film skips over any potential postpartum issues Venba might have had. The weariness, hormonal shifts, and emotional swings that frequently coincide with the postpartum phase are not mentioned. Without any indication of the difficulties that many new moms face, such sleep loss or the potential for postpartum depression, Venba is portrayed as a serene and collected mother. An incomplete picture of motherhood is presented by this omission, which ignores the difficulties with physical and mental health that are frequently encountered during the postpartum period. The lack of understanding of the postpartum phase in the movie is further demonstrated by the emotional distance that exists between Thamizh Nadan and Venba during this time. In real life, the additional responsibilities of caring for a newborn during the postpartum period can cause a great deal of strain on relationships. But Thamizh Nadan and Venba are portrayed in *Pasanga 2* as being completely in sync, and there is no discussion of the stress or emotional difficulties they would experience together in the postpartum period. The movie skips over any possible tension,

loneliness, or irritation that might surface— especially for Venba as a brand-new mother. By glossing over the complex emotional dynamics that might arise during the postpartum period, this lack of inquiry leads to an idealized narrative that presents a distorted picture of motherhood that does not completely reflect the genuine experiences of many parents.

Some other instance, mask the reality could be viewed in the movie. A few scenes from the film illustrate this romanticization: -The lead character, Bindu Madhavi's portrayal of Kavin's wife, smiles and cheerfully tends to her infant and toddler, showing no symptoms of tension or exhaustion. The idea that moms should be independent and stoic is reinforced by the film's emphasis on the mother's capacity to juggle childcare and household duties without assistance.

The portrayal of the protagonist's wife, as a smiling, carefree parent of her toddler and infant is one of the main examples of this romanticization. Even in the middle of chaos, she is shown to have a neat home, impeccable style, and a composed disposition. The unreasonable expectation that new mothers should be able to handle everything without any signs of exhaustion, stress, or emotional difficulty is fostered by this image. In addition, the story of the movie moves smoothly into motherhood without illustrating the mental anguish, bodily suffering, or lack of sleep that frequently come with it. The protagonist's wife is shown to have an instant bond with her kid and to not experience any self-doubt, anxiety, or difficulties with breastfeeding. The complexity and challenges that many women encounter during the postpartum period are overlooked by this oversimplification. The film also perpetuates the idea that mothers ought to be independent and unflappable. The notion that women should be able to do everything on their own is perpetuated by the protagonist's wife, who is shown to manage childcare and household duties without any assistance. This upholds the shame associated with seeking assistance and the erroneous notion of a "supermom."

Postpartum period crimes might be exacerbated by the idealized depiction of parenthood in the media and in society expectations. The idealized portrayal of motherhood as a flawless, happy experience can cause new moms who struggle with the realities of caring for a newborn to feel inadequate, guilty, and ashamed. The pressure to live up to social norms can lead to increased levels of anxiety, sadness, and even violent outbursts. Women may be discouraged from getting treatment because of the stigma associated with postpartum mental health disorders and the notion that a mother and infant should bond right away. The romanticization of parenthood creates a poisonous atmosphere that can lead to catastrophic outcomes by ignoring the real, emotional, and physical difficulties that many new mothers encounter. Furthermore, the idea that a mother's value is dependent on her capacity to provide her kid with faultless care can be reinforced by the media's emphasis on the "perfect" motherchild bond. A skewed perception of motherhood could result from this, in which a mother's identity is determined only by her bond with her kid. The results can be disastrous if reality doesn't live up to these irrational expectations. Redefining the narrative around motherhood is crucial, taking into account all of its intricacies and difficulties. We may attempt to create a supportive atmosphere that encourages new moms to seek treatment without fear of condemnation by exchanging real stories and encouraging candid conversations about postpartum mental health. Then and only then can we hope to improve the perception of motherhood and lower the number of postpartum period crimes.

Postpartum period crimes might be exacerbated by the idealized depiction of parenthood in the media and in society expectations. For new mothers, this inaccurate portrayal sets unachievable standards that cause emotions of humiliation and inadequacy.

The stress of having to live up to these standards can lead to aggression, despair, and anxiety. Acts of desperation may result from new mothers feeling imprisoned and unable to fulfill the expectations of the ideal parent. Women are discouraged from seeking care because postpartum mental health issues are stigmatized. They keep suffering because they dread being judged and rejected. The physical, mental, and emotional difficulties of being a new mother are disregarded by the media and society norms. This produces a poisonous atmosphere that makes new mothers feel alone and alone. It is harmful to believe that a mother's value is determined by her capacity to provide perfect care for her child. It upholds a skewed conception of motherhood in which a mother's identity is determined exclusively by her bond with her kid. The results can be disastrous if reality doesn't live up to these aspirations. Crimes related to the postpartum period can happen, including mother suicide and infanticide. It's critical to redefine the story of parenthood. We need to encourage candid conversations about postpartum mental health while acknowledging the difficulties and complexities of being a new mother.

Authentic sources that happened in India is provided to substantiate this. A 35-year-old Delhi father named Rohit Kumar killed his 3-day-old kid in 2019 because he was experiencing worry and postpartum depression. Due to the demands of fatherhood, sleep deprivation, and money problems, Kumar's relationship with his wife soured and he grew more and more alone. When left alone with his infant, Kumar smothered the child out of overwhelming grief. He later told police that he could not bear to think of his son going through hardship in life. His case, which resulted in his detention and indictment for murder, raised awareness of the problem of paternal postpartum depression in India, a country with stigmatized and inadequate mental health services. The episode underscores the need of tackling mental health stigma in India as well as the need for increased knowledge and assistance for new fathers.

Kavitha, a 27-year-old woman from Kozhikode, Kerala, killed her 22-day-old son in

2018 because she was experiencing anxiety and postpartum depression. Due to the demands of parenthood, sleep deprivation, and housework, Kavitha's relationship with her husband deteriorated and she grew more and more alone. When Kavitha was left alone with her newborn, she became so overcome with grief that she smothered the child. She later told authorities that she couldn't handle the idea of her son going through hardship in life. Her apprehension and subsequent murder accusations raised awareness of postpartum depression in Kerala and underscored the necessity of more understanding and assistance for newlywed mothers. The instance emphasizes how critical it is to overcome stigma around mental health in Kerala, where getting care is frequently associated with shame.

Sajith, a 32-year-old father in Thrissur, Kerala, killed his 2-month-old daughter in 2020 as a result of anxiety and postpartum depression in his family. Due to the demands of parenthood, sleep deprivation, and money worries, Sajith's relationship with his wife soured and he grew more and more alone. When Sajith was left alone with his baby, he became so overcome with emotion that he aggressively shook the child, inflicting severe brain injuries. After his arrest, he was accused of murder. This instance highlighted the need for increased knowledge and assistance for new fathers and raised awareness of paternal postpartum depression in Kerala. It also emphasizes how critical it is to overcome stigma around mental health in Kerala, where getting care is frequently associated with stigma.

## CONCLUSION

Through this mask of romantic manifestation, this provides an illusion about parenthood as a bed of roses. Reality is not pondered through this and provides misconceptions about parenthood and also fails to address the issue of postpartum period and depression. This phase is not much delved in most of the films, and if it's delved, paternal postpartum stage is neglected. This particular section of the movie fails to address the postpartum stage which is very crucial in the life of new parents. It also tries to enhance the so called normal delivery and also portrays c-section in a red shade. The character Venba shows that pregnancy is the most delightful period and is glorified to that extent that it mask the reality. Postpartum period is not discussed in the movie at all, which is very crucial in the life of all new parents. The term 'pasanga' means children in Tamil. The movie also exhibits children life, but parents are the most important element in the life of any children. So, about them is not much pondered in the movie, especially their postpartum period. So this movie cannot be considered as a perfect film about children in our opinion.

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# **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF *NORWEGIAN WOOD* BY HARUKI MURAKAMI: AN EXPLORATION OF MENTAL HEALTH**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami is a poignant exploration of love, loss, and the fragility of the human mind, set against the backdrop of 1960s Japan. This novel delves into the psychological struggles of its characters, offering a nuanced portrayal of mental health. The study examines how mental health is depicted in “*Norwegian Wood*” and considers its impact on societal attitudes and understanding of mental health issues. It also aims to explore the broader implications of the novel’s treatment of these issues and its contribution to contemporary mental health discourse.

## **KEYWORDS**

*Mental Health, Mental illness, Suicide, Depression, grief, Anxiety.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Haruki Murakami’s novel “*Norwegian Wood*” transcends the coming-of-age genre by presenting a profound exploration of mental health, human vulnerability, and the search for identity amid the tumult of adolescence. Set in 1960s Japan, a period marked by significant social and political change, the book captures an era characterized by both hope and existential despair. Through the intertwined lives of its central characters, Toru, Naoko, and Reiko, Murakami explores the complexities of mental illness, portraying it as an integral part of the human experience rather than an anomaly. By approaching mental health with empathy and nuance, Murakami challenges the conventional stigmatization of these issues. The novel’s depiction of mental illness, particularly through the experiences of Naoko and Reiko, reflects society’s ongoing struggle to understand and address mental health challenges. By seamlessly integrating these themes into the narrative, Murakami encourages readers to confront the uncomfortable realities of depression, trauma, and existential anguish, thereby fostering greater awareness and compassion. This paper examines how “*Norwegian Wood*” contributes to a nuanced understanding of mental illness, focusing on its literary and societal influences. Through in-depth character analysis, thematic exploration, and discussion of the novel’s cultural significance, this study seeks to illustrate how Murakami’s portrayal challenges societal stigmas and promotes empathy and understanding, potentially transforming readers’ attitudes toward mental health.

## THEMATIC EXPLORATION OF MENTAL HEALTH

The novel addresses various aspects of mental health, including depression, trauma, and suicide, reflecting the emotional and existential challenges that the characters face. This thematic exploration examines how Murakami represents mental health issues and their effects on the characters' lives, uncovering the profound nature of their struggles.

1. Depression and Alienation: Depression is one of the most pervasive themes in "*Norwegian Wood*," manifesting in several characters and driving much of the narrative. The protagonist, Toru Watanabe, experiences a profound sense of alienation and emotional numbness, which are symptomatic of depression. From the very beginning, Toru's introspective nature and detachment from those around him suggest an underlying struggle with mental health: "I was 37 then, strapped in my seat as the huge 747 plunged through dense cloud cover on approach to Hamburg Airport. Cold November rains drenched the earth, lending everything the gloomy air of a Flemish painting." (Murakami, 1987, p. 1). This opening passage establishes the novel's tone, emphasizing isolation and melancholy. Toru's sense of alienation intensifies due to his inability to fully connect with others, especially after his close friend Kizuki's suicide. This event marks a turning point in Toru's life, intensifying his feelings of loneliness and detachment. Naoko also reflects the theme of alienation, with her fragile mental state closely tied to her experiences of loss and trauma. Her depression manifests in her retreat into silence and her struggle to articulate her feelings: "It's not that I don't want to talk to you. There are so many things I want to talk about. But as soon as I try to put them into words, I feel like I'm suffocating." (Murakami, 1987, p. 120). Naoko's inability to express herself reflects the isolating nature of depression, where the individual feels trapped within their mind, unable to reach out for help. Her eventual withdrawal into a sanatorium is both a physical and emotional manifestation of her depression, highlighting the debilitating effects of the condition.

2. The Profound Impact of Trauma: Trauma is a central theme in "*Norwegian Wood*," with several characters grappling with the aftermath of devastating experiences. The novel explores how trauma can shape a person's mental health, often leading to long-lasting psychological scars. Naoko's character is primarily defined by the trauma of losing her sister and Kizuki to suicide. These losses leave her emotionally shattered, struggling to cope with the overwhelming grief and guilt that follow. The weight of this trauma is evident in her fragile mental state and her eventual retreat from the world: "Kizuki's death had been my death as well. He had pulled the trigger of a gun that was aimed at my heart." (Murakami, 1987, p. 73). Naoko's words underscore the profound impact of trauma on her sense of self and her ability to engage with life. The trauma she carries is not just a memory but a constant, haunting presence that influences her every action and thought. Reiko, another character at the sanatorium, also embodies the theme of trauma. Her history of sexual abuse and the subsequent fallout from her attempt to build a life afterward illustrate the long-term effects of trauma on mental health. Reiko's struggles with trust, intimacy, and self-worth are a testament to how deeply trauma can affect a person's everyday functioning.

3. Suicide as a Response to Existential Despair: Suicide is a recurring motif in "*Norwegian Wood*," serving as a response to the characters' existential despair and a commentary on the

fragility of the human psyche. The novel begins with the suicide of Kizuki, which sets the stage for the exploration of how his death affects those around him. Kizuki's suicide acts as a catalyst for the emotional unraveling of both Toru and Naoko, and it casts a shadow over the entire narrative. Naoko's eventual suicide is perhaps the most tragic event in the novel, representing the culmination of her struggles with mental illness. Her suicide is portrayed not as an act of selfishness but as a final, desperate attempt to escape the unbearable pain she feels: "I'm not trying to blame anyone or anything. This is my problem. I have to solve it myself, and I don't have any other way out." (Murakami, 1987, p. 294). Naoko's decision to take her own life is a reflection of the depth of her despair and the sense of hopelessness that often accompanies severe depression. It highlights the tragic reality that, for some, suicide can seem like the only solution to their suffering. Kizuki and Naoko's suicides also serve to illustrate the ripple effect of such actions on those left behind. The loss of his friends profoundly alters Toru's life, compelling him to confront the existential questions that their deaths raise. The novel suggests that suicide, while an intensely personal act, has far-reaching consequences that can devastate the lives of others.

4. The Role of Relationships in Mental Health: Relationships are a central theme in "*Norwegian Wood*," particularly in how they influence the characters' mental health. The novel suggests that while relationships can offer solace and support, they can also be sources of pain and confusion, especially for those struggling with mental health issues. Toru's relationships with Naoko and Midori represent two different aspects of his emotional life. With Naoko, Toru experiences a deep, almost suffocating connection rooted in shared trauma and loss. Their relationship is marked by a sense of fragility and impermanence, reflecting Naoko's unstable mental state. Despite his love for Naoko, Toru is keenly aware of the limitations of their relationship and the toll it has on his mental well-being. In contrast, Toru's relationship with Midori offers the possibility of healing and renewal. Midori's vibrant, unpredictable nature starkly contrasts with Naoko's quiet despair, representing a potential escape from Toru's cycle of grief and alienation. However, Toru's inability to fully commit to Midori reflects his ongoing struggle to reconcile his past with his present: "I want you always to remember me. Will you remember that I existed and that I stood next to you here like this?" (Murakami, 1987, p. 360). Midori's plea encapsulates the novel's exploration of the human need for connection and recognition. Toru's relationships illustrate the complex interplay between love, mental health, and the quest for meaning in life.

5. Coping Mechanisms and the Search for Meaning: Throughout "*Norwegian Wood*," the characters employ various coping mechanisms to deal with their mental health issues and their existential dilemmas. For some, like Naoko, these mechanisms are ultimately insufficient, leading to tragic outcomes. For others, like Toru, searching for meaning becomes a way to navigate life's challenges. Toru's journey throughout the novel is one of self-discovery and acceptance. He grapples with the losses he has experienced and the emotions that accompany them, trying to find a way to move forward. His introspective nature and his love of literature serve as tools for understanding his place in the world, even as he struggles with the weight of his past: "I've gone through a lot of things, and I'm slowly beginning to understand what they mean. Maybe there's no meaning in them at all, but that's something I'll have to figure out on my own." (Murakami, 1987, p. 302). This quote reflects Toru's ongoing quest for meaning and

recognition that this is a profoundly personal journey. The novel suggests that while searching for meaning is fraught with difficulties, it is also an essential part of the human experience.

## LITERARY DEVICES AND SYMBOLISM

Murakami employs various literary devices and symbols throughout *Norwegian Wood* to underscore the themes of mental health.

1. Symbolism of water: Water is a recurring symbol in *Norwegian Wood*, often representing the emotional states of the characters and the themes of memory, loss, and the passage of time. The imagery of water, whether in rain, rivers, or wells, serves as a metaphor for the fluidity and unpredictability of life and emotions. Naoko, one of the central characters, frequently describes herself with water, particularly as a “deep well.” This metaphor reflects her sense of being trapped in her mind, with her emotions hidden away beneath the surface, inaccessible to others: “I’m a real, live girl, with real, live blood gushing through my veins. So why is it that I feel like I’m missing something inside?” (Murakami, 1987, p. 125). The “deep well” symbolizes Naoko’s profound sense of isolation and the depth of her psychological wounds. Just as a well contains water deep below the surface, Naoko’s emotions are buried within her, making it difficult for her to connect with others or understand herself. The motif of rain, which frequently appears throughout the novel, further reinforces this symbolism. Rain often accompanies moments of sadness or introspection, mirroring the characters’ internal emotional landscapes. For example, the rain that falls during Toru and Naoko’s walks together reflects their relationship’s melancholic and unresolved nature and the pervasive sorrow surrounding Naoko’s character.

2. Music as a Leitmotif: Music, particularly the Beatles’ song “*Norwegian Wood*,” plays a significant role in the novel, serving as a leitmotif that evokes the melancholic tone of the narrative. The song’s lyrics and melody resonate with the themes of memory, loss, and longing that permeate the novel. The song symbolizes the past and its lingering impact on the present, much like Toru’s haunting memories of Naoko and Kizuki. The title of the novel, derived from the Beatles’ song, is significant in its own right. The song’s lyrics describe a fleeting romantic encounter that leaves a sense of emptiness and unfulfilled desire, mirroring the characters’ experiences in the novel. Just as the song reflects a longing for something unattainable, so do the characters in *Norwegian Wood* grapple with their desires and the elusive nature of happiness. The use of music in the novel also bridges the characters’ inner worlds and the external reality. For instance, when Toru listens to “*Norwegian Wood*,” it triggers a flood of memories, allowing him to relive moments from his past. This connection between music and memory underscores the novel’s exploration of how the past continues to shape and influence the present.

3. Imagery of Nature: Nature imagery is another prominent literary device in “*Norwegian Wood*,” used to reflect the characters’ emotional states and the themes of impermanence and change. The novel fills its pages with descriptions of the natural world, from the changing seasons to the landscapes the characters inhabit. These descriptions often serve as metaphors for the characters’ inner experiences. For example, the recurring imagery of autumn, with its dying leaves and cooling air, symbolizes the transience of life and the inevitability of change. Autumn, a season

associated with decay and the end of cycles, mirrors the sense of loss and the gradual deterioration of Naoko's mental health. The natural world in *Norwegian Wood* is not just a backdrop but an active participant in the narrative, reflecting the characters' psychological states and the novel's growth, decay, and renewal themes. The retreat to the sanatorium, set in the mountains and surrounded by nature, symbolizes a place of healing and isolation. The serene, almost otherworldly setting contrasts with the chaos of the outside world, representing a space where the characters can confront their inner demons. However, this isolation also highlights the characters' struggles with loneliness and their disconnection from the world.

4. Foreshadowing: Murakami uses foreshadowing throughout "*Norwegian Wood*" to hint at the tragic outcomes that will unfold. The novel opens with Toru's reflections as an adult, foreshadowing the losses and emotional turmoil he will experience. The melancholy tone of the novel is established early on, with subtle hints about the fate of characters like Naoko: "The song on the radio brought back memories of a girl I knew long ago. Memories of a time when everything was simpler, and all life's complications had not yet revealed themselves." (Murakami, 1987, p. 3). This passage foreshadows the emotional complexity and inevitable heartbreak defining Toru's relationships. Murakami's use of foreshadowing creates a sense of impending doom, underscoring the novel's exploration of mortality and the impact of past traumas on the present.

5. Metaphor of the Labyrinth: The labyrinth metaphor is another powerful literary device in "*Norwegian Wood*." The labyrinth symbolizes the complexity of the human mind, the confusion and disorientation accompanying mental illness, and the characters' search for meaning and direction in their lives. Toru often feels as though he is navigating a labyrinth, uncertain of his path and unsure of how to escape the emotional turmoil he finds himself in: "I don't know if I've grown up at all since then, or if maybe I'm still lost in that labyrinth." (Murakami, 1987, p. 368). This metaphor captures the existential crisis that Toru and other characters experience as they grapple with their identities and life's challenges. The labyrinth also represents the complexity of human relationships, with their twists and turns, dead ends, and the occasional moments of clarity.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

To deepen the analysis of mental health in "*Norwegian Wood*", we can examine the novel through various psychological frameworks that elucidate the characters' experiences—focusing on three critical psychological perspectives: grief and mourning, existential psychology, and attachment theory.

1. Grief and Mourning: Grief and mourning are central to understanding the psychological landscape of *Norwegian Wood*. Sigmund Freud's classic distinction between mourning and melancholia provides a valuable framework for analyzing the characters' reactions to loss. Freud's Theory: Freud differentiates mourning from melancholia by suggesting that mourning is a normal, though painful, process of coming to terms with loss, whereas melancholia involves a pathological attachment to the lost object. In "*Norwegian Wood*," Kizuki's suicide profoundly affects both Toru and Naoko. Freud's notion of melancholia is particularly relevant for Naoko,



whose inability to move beyond Kizuki's death and her retreat into the sanatorium reflect a pathological form of mourning. Freud describes this as a state where the individual experiences a profound sense of loss and helplessness, characterized by a lack of detachment from the deceased (Freud, 1917). Naoko's isolation and her eventual collapse into an emotional and physical breakdown underscore her struggle with unresolved grief. Murakami writes, "Naoko's life had become a mirror of her own internal world, reflecting the depth of her mourning" (Murakami, 1987). Her continued attachment to Kizuki, despite his death, exemplifies Freud's concept of melancholia, as she seems unable to reinvest her emotional energy into new relationships or pursuits.

2. Existential Psychology: Existential psychology offers insights into the characters' search for meaning amidst their struggles with mental health. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, which emphasizes the pursuit of meaning as a central aspect of psychological well-being, is particularly relevant here. Frankl's Logotherapy: Viktor Frankl argues that searching for meaning is crucial for overcoming despair. According to Frankl, individuals who find purpose in their lives are better equipped to face suffering and existential challenges (Frankl, 1959). In "*Norwegian Wood*," Toru Watanabe's existential quest reflects his struggle to understand his identity and place in the world after Kizuki's death. Toru's sense of purposelessness and his existential questioning are evident throughout the novel. For instance, he often reflects on the futility of his efforts to connect with others and find solace. Murakami describes Toru's alienation: "He felt like a ghost wandering through a world he no longer belonged to" (Murakami, 1987). This reflects Frankl's idea that individuals may experience profound disorientation and emotional distress without a sense of meaning.

3. Attachment Theory: Attachment theory provides another perspective on the relationships depicted in the novel, particularly how early attachment experiences influence mental health and interpersonal dynamics. Attachment Theory: John Bowlby's attachment theory posits that early relationships with care givers shape individuals' ability to form healthy emotional bonds later in life. Secure attachments generally lead to healthier relationships and emotional resilience, while insecure attachments can contribute to difficulties in managing emotions and forming stable relationships (Bowlby, 1969). The novel illustrates how the characters' early experiences with attachment impact their current relationships. Naoko's troubled relationship with Kizuki and her subsequent emotional instability suggest a background of insecure attachment. Her reliance on Toru for emotional support and her eventual retreat to the sanatorium highlight the influence of her early attachment experiences on her mental health. Toru's interactions with Naoko and Midori reveal his attachment struggles and difficulty forming stable emotional connections. Murakami writes, "Toru's relationships were like threads in a tapestry, frayed and incomplete, reflecting his unresolved attachments" (Murakami, 1987).

## **IMPACT OF "*NORWEGIAN WOOD*" ON PUBLIC DISCOURSE AND MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**

Haruki Murakami's "*Norwegian Wood*" has significantly impacted public discourse and mental health awareness in Japan and internationally. The novel's exploration of mental health themes

has resonated with readers and contributed to broader conversations about mental illness, its representation in literature, and its societal implications.

1. Raising Awareness About Mental Health: “*Norwegian Wood*” has played a crucial role in raising awareness about mental health issues. The novel’s sensitive and nuanced portrayal of depression, trauma, and suicide has brought these often-stigmatized topics into the public eye. By addressing mental health with empathy and depth, Murakami has encouraged readers to engage with and reflect on these issues more informed and compassionate. The depiction of Naoko’s struggle with depression and her eventual suicide, alongside Toru’s emotional turmoil, offers readers a window into the complexities of mental illness. The novel challenges simplistic and stigmatizing views of mental health by presenting characters who are deeply affected by their psychological struggles, thereby fostering a greater understanding of the emotional and existential dimensions of mental health issues.

2. Influencing Public Discourse in Japan: In Japan, where mental health issues have historically been marginalized and stigmatized, “*Norwegian Wood*” has contributed to a shift in public discourse. The novel’s exploration of mental health themes has prompted conversations about the challenges faced by individuals struggling with mental illness and has highlighted the need for greater empathy and support. Murakami’s work has resonated with many readers, sparking discussions about the portrayal of mental health in media and literature. The novel’s impact is evident in the increased openness to discussing mental health topics in Japanese society. While there are still cultural barriers and stigma surrounding mental health, *Norwegian Wood* has played a role in challenging these attitudes and encouraging a more nuanced and compassionate approach to mental illness.

3. Impact on Literary and Cultural Discussions: The novel’s portrayal of mental health has also influenced literary and cultural discussions on a global scale. “*Norwegian Wood*” has been widely discussed in academic circles, literary reviews, and media, contributing to debates about the representation of mental health in literature. Murakami’s depiction of mental illness has been praised for its sensitivity and realism, setting a standard for portraying mental health in literary works. In addition to its influence on literary discussions, “*Norwegian Wood*” has been a catalyst for broader conversations about mental health in popular culture. The novel’s success and widespread readership have helped to bring mental health issues to the forefront of cultural conversations, encouraging greater awareness and understanding across different contexts.

4. Contributions to Mental Health Advocacy: “*Norwegian Wood*” has also contributed to mental health advocacy by highlighting the importance of addressing mental health issues and supporting those affected. The novel’s exploration of the emotional and psychological challenges its characters face underscores the need for empathy, understanding, and effective mental health care. The novel’s impact extends beyond literature, inspiring readers and advocates to engage more actively in mental health advocacy. By bringing mental health issues to a broader audience, “*Norwegian Wood*” has played a role in promoting discussions about mental health care, support systems, and the importance of reducing stigma.

5. Reflection and Critical Engagement: The novel’s portrayal of mental health has prompted reflection and critical engagement among readers, scholars, and mental health professionals.



Discussions about “*Norwegian Wood*” often examine the accuracy and sensitivity of its depiction of mental health issues, leading to a deeper exploration of how literature and media represent mental illness. Critics and readers have engaged with the novel’s themes to explore the broader implications of mental health representation. This critical engagement has fostered a deeper understanding and awareness of the challenges and opportunities in portraying mental illness in a manner that is both respectful and meaningful.

## CONCLUSION

“*Norwegian Wood*” contributes to the conversation about mental health by presenting a realistic and empathetic portrayal of mental illness. Murakami’s nuanced exploration of depression, trauma, and suicide offers readers a deeper insight into the emotional and psychological dimensions of these experiences. Murakami’s nuanced exploration of depression, trauma, and suicide provides readers with a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological experiences associated with these conditions. The novel challenges traditional stigmas and encourages a more compassionate and informed perspective on mental health. Murakami’s work highlights the importance of addressing mental health issues with sensitivity and depth, underscoring the need for empathy and support. By bringing these themes to the forefront, “*Norwegian Wood*” is a powerful reminder of the complexities of mental illness and the importance of engaging in open dialogue. The novel’s impact on public discourse reflects its significance as a work that tells a compelling story and contributes meaningfully to mental health discussions. Its influence on public discourse and mental health awareness highlights the power of literature to address complex emotional and psychological issues. Continued research can expand on these insights, further exploring the novel’s impact and contributing to a deeper understanding of mental health in literature and society.

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## EXPLORING THE EFFICACY OF EYETH IN SARA NOVIĆ'S *TRUE BIZ*

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### ABSTRACT

*Literature works like a charm in decluttering the social stigmas built around any oppressed community. It has the potential to make people reconsider things they have been believing even for centuries altogether. Disability studies as an interdisciplinary field evolving in literature that helps to analyse how disability is portrayed in literary texts in the due course of history. Literature is a highly influential tool that determines how people perceive disability and adhere to the concept of inclusivity. Sara Nović is a deaf novelist who strives to voice out the rights of the deaf community and the need for recognition of deaf culture through her writings. Her novel True Biz unravels the nuances of deaf culture through the main characters Charlie, February and Austin. Sara Nović weaves their lives together in the fabric of deaf culture, American Sign Language, and deaf education. They stand as an embodiment of resilience while trying to give life to their utopian land i.e., the 'Eyeth' through the social model of disability. Sara Nović makes her readers marvel at the richness of Deaf culture and enables them to question their preconceived notions about deaf people. This paper focuses on the necessity to create an inclusive society by equating the mythical concept of 'Eyeth' with the social model of disability. It highlights how the main characters navigate through their lives which are intertwined with each other in the hearing world which expects them to 'fit in'.*

### KEYWORDS

*Deaf culture, Eyeth, Social model of disability, Inclusivity, American Sign Language and Deaf education.*

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Literature is an invincible tool that can be used to build an inclusive society which serves as a safe space for people from various social and cultural backgrounds. It facilitates the exploration of the needs and demands of the disabled people that lay buried under the stereotypes and stigmas constructed by the society through the interdisciplinary field known as Disability Studies. Disability Studies sheds light on how literature portrays disabled people and disability in literary texts and how it has evolved so far. It tracks down whether the characters of the disabled people are designed to evoke sympathy among the audience or to voice out their needs and demands in order to create an accessible society. It also highlights the power of literature in influencing the attitudes of the people towards the disabled community.

Ableism is a concept in disability studies that is defined as the notion in which non-disabled people believe that disabled people are inferior to them and thereby subjecting the disabled people to different forms of oppression and discrimination. It propagates the belief that having a disability is a negative thing and so disabled people are not 'normal'. It marginalises the disabled people by shoving the idea of 'otherness' down their throats and denies to fulfil even their basic rights.

The role of literature becomes crucial as it bears the responsibility to declutter the systemic inequalities and to represent the disabled people to the readers in a proper way. Either it can be used to evoke a sense of pity among them which leads to further marginalisation of the disabled people or it can depict the authenticity of the community which ensures their rightful belonging to the societal structures constructed by human beings. It can also contribute to the act of eliminating the generalised opinion that disabilities are something 'to be fixed' and disabled people should be made to 'fit in'. Literature can turn the tables around by conveying the fact that disability is just a different way of experiencing life and disabled people have the right to lead a dignified life in this society where it is the duty of everyone to make it accessible for them.

Sara Nović is an American deaf novelist and a deaf rights activist who voices out for the rights of the deaf community through her writings. She is also a creative writing professor and a translator who tries to bridge the gap between the deaf community and the hearing world. In her book *True Biz*, Sara Nović unravels the uniqueness of deaf culture by highlighting its richness in ensuring the inclusivity of the deaf people. She proposes her thoughts through her fictitious tale spun around the lives of her main characters Charlie, February and Austin. Nović puts forth a more authentic representation of the deaf community by incorporating the American Sign Language (ASL) in the novel. She shows that visual communication is nonetheless inferior to oral communication by taking her readers into the world of deaf people.

*True Biz* can be considered as one of the masterpieces in the field of disability studies which is mainly noted for its authentic and sterling portrayal of the deaf community. It spins around the lives of Charlie, a deaf transfer student who is purposefully denied the contact of another deaf person before; February, the headmistress of River Valley School for the Deaf (RVSD) who struggles to preserve the deaf culture while trying to balance her personal life; Austin, the star student of River Valley who starts questioning the flawlessness of his existence upon the arrival of his hearing sister.

Sara Nović's *True Biz* stands as a testament to the oppression and struggles faced by the deaf people in the world built for the hearing people. It explores the facets of the deaf culture and brings into view the differences between being medically deaf and culturally Deaf. Deaf Culture can be considered as a correlation of the life experiences of deaf people which they find to be common among themselves. According to the World Federation of the Deaf, Deaf Culture comprises the beliefs, attitudes, history, norms, values, literary traditions and art shared by the Deaf people. The novel advocates for many inclusive concepts such as recognition of deaf culture, importance of deaf schools & deaf education, significance of American Sign Language, preservation of deaf traditions, creation of an inclusive & an accessible society, identity crisis faced by the deaf people in the hearing world and so on.

'Eyeth' is an intriguing concept which belongs to the deaf mythology and it indicates a utopian planet of the deaf people. Eyeth fortifies the dire need to recognize Deaf culture as a culture and highlights the things valued by deaf people such as sign language, accessibility, communication, inclusivity, etc., "In the Deaf world, there's a famous story of a utopian planet where everyone

signs and everything is designed for easy visual access” (83). In some tellings, Eyeth also consists of the hearing people who are the minority where they comply with adapting the sign language.

Eyeth can be considered as a representation of a safe and happy place for the Deaf who are usually made to feel left out in the hearing world. It emphasises the restrictions imposed upon the Deaf people and its consequences upon their well-being. “It expresses our dreams: equality, a special place to call our own free from the demands of hearing society, recognition of our culture” (83). Eyeth can be equated with the social model of disability which is a theoretical framework designed to view disabilities from a different perspective rather than looking at them as something ‘to be fixed’ or ‘abnormal’. Inclusion can be made possible only by dismantling the notion in the minds of non-disabled people that inherently expect disabled people to ‘fit in’ to the existing societal structures. Perceiving disability through the social model of disability paves way for the elimination of such ideas and leads to the recreation of the society into an inclusive one.

The social model of disability focuses on the barriers prevailing in the society that actually ‘disable’ people from living their lives in the ways they want to live. It recommends the elimination of such barriers from society in order to create an inclusive environment. It brings out the differences between physical impairment and disability where the former pertains to the medical condition of an individual and the latter denotes the restrictions imposed upon such individuals. According to Tom Shakespeare in his essay in the book *The Disability Studies Reader* (edited by Lennard J. Davis) the emergence of the social model can be traced back to the political statements put forth by the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). UPIAS propagates the social model of disability which subscribes to the Marxist ideas thereby rejecting the reformist ideas. “Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society” (UPIAS, 1975) (TDSR 215). In the view of UPIAS, the physically impaired people are disabled by the society which is inaccessible and ableist.

The social model of disability is in contrast with the medical or individual model of disability. According to Mike Oliver, “Models are ways of translating ideas into practice and the idea underpinning the individual model was that of personal tragedy, while the idea underpinning the social model was that of externally imposed restriction” (Oliver, 2004) (TDSR 216). It is also important to note that the social model of disability subscribes to the idea of intersection with other forms of oppressions such as sexism, racism, classicism and other social inequities that are prevalent in the society.

*True Biz* constitutes the social model of disability through the various components of the novel such as characters, setting, narrative techniques, and so on. Sara Nović blends the concepts that emphasize deaf education, Deaf culture, and inclusivity by using this model. Being a deaf rights activist, the author helps the readers to join the journey of the deaf characters in the hearing world. The novel paves way for the readers to witness how the social model of disability can empower the society to be inclusive, making it a safe space for everyone. It also sheds light on the consequences of perceiving disability through the lens of the medical model of disability which impacts the lives of disabled people in a negative way and forces them into an isolated space.

The authentic portrayal of the life of deaf people in the novel broadens the space to view deafness through the lens of the social model of disability. Sara Nović brings out the reality of

how the deaf people are denied to exercise their agency over their own bodies. The hearing parents of the deaf children often refuse to value their kid's bodily autonomy mainly when it comes to inserting the implants, despite knowing that the implants prove to be inefficient in many cases in the novel. Charlie continues to use the implant even though she finds the machine utterly useless as her mother insists her to do so. The sheer contempt Charlie has for the implant is expressed by her in many events in the novel. Being the parent of a minor kid, her mother tries to take control over how Charlie should lead her life.

*True Biz* points out the societal barriers faced by the deaf people that has been laid out for centuries in the hearing world. The barriers include not making it mandatory to have a sign language interpreter for the deaf people even if the concerned interaction takes place in a hospital where deaf people go for their medical checkups. Deaf people, mainly deaf kids, are forced to learn lip reading so that it will be 'easier' for the hearing ones to have conversations with them. February's mom chooses to give birth to her child at home as she feels scared to enter the labour ward where no one knows sign language. Sara Nović draws the contrasting threads between Austin and Charlie where the former grows up to be a confident one at RVSD because of his fluency in American Sign Language and the latter gets forced to shrink her existence at Jefferson, which is the mainstream school with zero access to sign language.

Learning sign language gives immense confidence to Charlie as it enables her to express her thoughts, opinions, needs, likes, dislikes, etc., and that's why February tells her parents during her admission that Charlie is programmed for visual communication. The deaf kids at RVSD feel more comfortable to use American Sign Language than the implants which are inefficient in most of the cases. Sign language essentially helps the deaf kids to understand the world better and it facilitates the development of a sense of individuality in them which is not possible if they are completely dependent on the implants.

Perceiving disability through the lens of the social model of disability focuses on how the allies i.e. the non-disabled people put efforts to create an inclusive society. February being a CODA (Children of Deaf Adults) stands as a strong ally to preserve the Deaf culture, to recognize the prominence of deaf education and to value the needs & demands of the deaf people. As the headmistress of the River Valley School for the Deaf, she makes sure that the school serves as a safe space for the deaf kids where they can develop a sense of belonging. February expresses her frustration about the sufferings of deaf kids like Charlie whose parents are always busy trying to 'fix' their kids. "It is so damn depressing, February said as she pushed through the side door. That the biggest dream some people can muster up for their child is "look normal" " (19). February always worries over the condition of the deaf kids who are forced to live according to the norms laid out in the hearing world by the hearing people.

The novel challenges people's misconceptions about deaf people and their ability to thrive in the hearing world. It acts as a central point which questions the false assumptions the hearing people have about the needs of the deaf community. The author uses one of the protagonists of the novel, Charlie as her mouthpiece to point out how the hearing people fail to accommodate the needs of the deaf people in their everyday lives. Charlie describes how she struggles to maintain a conversation with the hearing people where they assume that Charlie will be able to comprehend whatever they say through the implant or through her practice of lip reading. Sara Nović also specifies the reasons why Charlie struggled in the mainstream school as the teachers turn to the board while they talk and write on the board simultaneously. This removes the feasible opportunities even to lipread what the teacher is saying which affects the grades of Charlie.

Eyeth is a remarkable concept in Deaf mythology and Deaf literature which share similar characteristic features with the social model of disability. Both the Eyeth and the social model of disability strive to create an inclusive world where deaf people can lead a dignified life and they criticize the hearing-centric narrative that has been set about the Deaf community. Eyeth as a fictitious place gives space for the activists and writers to exercise their freedom in imagining a world where everyone knows sign language and ensures that Deaf people are not the linguistic minority. It envisions the society to be a place which is designed for visual communication, i.e. communicating using sign language. In *True Biz*, Sara Nović gives life to the concept of Eyeth through the portrayal of River Valley School for the Deaf (RVSD), a fictitious school which operates on the basis of the social model of disability.

Eyeth and RVSD are like two peas in a pod which work upon the same principle of redirecting the life of deaf people into a more Deaf-centric environment from a hearing-centric world. They vote for an atmosphere where due importance is given to practising visual communication and preserving the Deaf culture & heritage. They strive to celebrate the deaf identity and the uniqueness of the deaf individuals. The author hints about the safe environment in RVSD where Charlie feels that the school looks more loved by the people inside it, when she enters the school with her father for their first ASL class.

RVSD is a pivotal point in restoring the sense of belongingness to a huge number of deaf kids by bringing them together in the Deaf community. Charlie always feels left out at Jefferson whereas she becomes one among the kids at RVSD without much difficulty. The fact that isolation and loneliness have engulfed Charlie to a greater extent which can be seen through her thoughts about how easily she gets included at RVSD. She thinks that the deaf kids at the school accepted her as they too might have faced rejection in their lives just like how Charlie did before she came to River Valley. The sense of being a community also gives them more power to exercise more control over their lives and to pursue their dreams.

Accessibility becomes a point of intersection for RVSD and the concept of Eyeth in Deaf mythology. Eyeth is a utopian planet which is programmed for visual communication where everyone knows sign language and everything in the planet facilitates visual access for the Deaf individuals. Similarly, RVSD consists of teachers who are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). The school also arranges Community Sign Language Classes for language-deprived deaf kids like Charlie and for the family members of the deaf kids to learn American Sign Language. Apart from sign language, the kids at RVSD list out the various aspects of creating their own accessible world where they will not feel alienated when February asks them to imagine Eyeth in their own way. “glass buildings with balconies, automatic doors, and wide hallways where two pairs of signing people could pass each other without having to break conversation to squeeze by” (85). The children also add that the hearing visitors would be given glasses which provide captions for the sign language used by the deaf people.

Sara Nović employs a third-person limited narrative style along with the usage of significant typographical differences. The author presents an intimate view of multiple perspectives of various characters, revealing their thoughts and feelings. The author also presents the visual layout of American Sign Language (ASL) in the novel by providing the pictorial description of signs along with their meanings. She also describes how to form the signs and what they mean in different contexts. She represents the ASL communication among the characters through spatial differences in the texts. Information about Deaf culture, history and heritage get

interspersed with the main narrative in order to provide unique insights to the readers about the Deaf community.

In *True Biz*, Sara Nović uses her characters such as Charlie, February and Austin to picture a world desired by the Deaf community. She sheds light on the reality of how the needs and demands of the Deaf people are ignored in the hearing-centric environment constructed by the human beings. On the contrary, Deaf people are forced to ‘fit into’ the world created by the hearing people instead of remodelling the society to accommodate the needs of Deaf individuals. The novel subscribes to the concept of social model of disability which is symbolically represented through the River Valley School for the Deaf (RVSD) - a real-life Eyeth for the Deaf kids.

The elimination of the obstacles faced by the Deaf people by shifting the focus to the societal barriers proves the efficacy of Eyeth and also serves as a reminder that creating such an accessible society primarily requires a huge shift in the mindset of the people. According to Andrew Gurza, a Canadian disability awareness consultant and activist, “We teach disabled people that they are superhuman. And then, we don’t give them any tools or resources to deal with the rejection of that not even being close to the truth”. By presenting the novel from the perspectives of characters who strive to create a world where the hearing people are not desperate to make the Deaf people to ‘hear’ them out, the author insists on the dire need to bring changes in the attitudes of the individual towards deafness.

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# UNRAVELLING THE UNCANNY IN HOLLY JACKSON'S *A GOOD GIRL'S GUIDE TO MURDER*

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper delves into the exploration of the uncanny in Holly Jackson's A Good Girl's Guide to Murder. Holly Jackson is an American novelist, best known for her young adult mystery fiction. The paper focuses on the protagonist of the novel, Pippa Fitz-Amobi, who uncovers the uncanny truth, about a crime that occurred five years ago. The paper centers on Pip's journey towards the unrevealed mystery and its psychological impact on her. Pip encounters numerous obstacles while trying to bring out the truth behind a murder, which leads to her mental imbalance. And she overcomes her emotional turmoil only after revealing the truth. Thus, depicts how Pip's motivation to unveil the truth acts as an agent for her to overcome her psychological instability. Pip's motivation is critically examined through Richard Ryan and Edward Deci's "Self – Determination Theory". The purpose of the paper is to show how unraveling the uncanny can lead to mental imbalance and the final revelation of truth acts as a form of therapy for the protagonist.*

## KEYWORDS

*Psychological or mental imbalance, emotional turmoil, motivation, self-determination Theory and therapeutic effect.*

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Holly Jackson is an American novelist who got widely recognized for her debut novel *A Good Girl's Guide To Murder*. The novel revolves around the protagonist Pippa Fitz-Amobi as she tries to bring out the truth behind a murder that happened five years ago. There are plenty of mysteries throughout the novel, which is unravel by Pip with her Extended Project Qualification as a medium. In the process of uncovering the facts of the murder, Pip faces many emotional challenges and finds herself entangled in the web of mysteries revolving around the Little Kilton town. As the protagonist slowly comes out of the circling riddles, she discloses the hidden secrets of many characters in the novel. Intrinsic motivation acts as the driving force for Pip to decipher the mystery of murder. Pip's motivation and her sense of satisfaction after finding the truth is examined through Richard Ryan and Edward Deci's "Self – Determination Theory", which circuitously acts as a therapy for her. Self-Determination Theory advocates that intrinsically motivated people value their activities and engage in them for their own inherent satisfaction instead of exterior benefits. Through Self-Determination Theory, it has been emphasized that she is intrinsically motivated person and her own self-satisfaction after the revelation of truth performs a therapeutic effect for her.

Uncanny refers to something which is strangely familiar yet foreign at the same time. It evokes a psychological reaction where something ordinary becomes eerie or unsettling. The author has woven many uncanny elements in the novel. Pip is a seventeen-year-old girl, who has taken up the five-year-old murder mystery case of Andie Bell as her extended project qualification (EPQ). The case is apparently closed stating that Andie Bell is murdered by her



boyfriend Sal Singh and him committing suicide because of his guilt. Everyone in the town believes in this allegation on Sal Singh but Pip has to say otherwise. She begins her investigation on this case because she believes that the accused murderer of Andie Bell namely Sal Singh is innocent. Sal Singh's death is confirmed but Andie's body has not been found for five years and is remains a mystery for everyone in the town. Pip strongly insists on taking up this project and she succeeds in her investigation with the help of Sal Singh's brother Ravi Singh. At first Andie is described as a pretty and naïve girl, whose death is mourned by everyone in the town, whereas Sal is depicted as a cruel murderer. But Pip's investigation reveals their true personalities, Andie as a cunning school bully, who handled some illegal business such as drug dealings in the town. In the case of Sal, he came to be accepted as the most innocent character in the novel. There are several other characters in the novel, whose real personality stays hidden until Pip brings them to light with her exploration. This contradictory representation of characters prevails in the novel, which evidently displays the theme of uncanny. The Little Kilton town itself leaves an unsettling image, because, before, the town appears to be small peaceful place but as the plot progresses, several dark sides of the town is revealed by the author. Thus, this type of representations stimulates Pip's uncanny feelings towards the town and certain people around her.

The protagonist's mental stability is affected by the uncanny elements of the town. Pip's project not only discovers the lurking secrets of Andie and town but also unravels the dark secrets of her loved ones. In the process of investigation, Pippa Fitz-Amobi confronts many disturbing truths about her trusted individuals, which eventually caused bad effects on her emotional wellbeing. Pip along with Ravi tries to prove the innocence of Sal. As the protagonist is just a seventeen-year-old teenage girl, she starts her inquiry using small tactics such as stalking online movement of the suspected person and getting information as a form of interview for her project. She reveals many hidden details about Andie Bell's life. When Pip interviewed two close friends of Andie Bell during their school days, she discovered that Andie was in an affair with a secret older boyfriend. Through Max Hasting's confession she learns that Andie was also engaged in illegal activities such as drug dealings. And each time Pip discovers a new piece of information about Andie's life, she invariably identifies additional suspects, expanding the scope of her investigation. When Pip interviews Ravi, using the excuse of school project she finds her first suspect Jason Bell, Andie Bell's father. Then later during her interview with one of Sal's close friend Max Hasting, she discovers another suspect named Naomi Ward. Naomi Ward is Pip's best friend Cara's sister, who is also like an elder sister to Pippa. The suspects were almost closely related to Pip which puts her mind in chaos. "Why are questions about Andie Bell returning answers about the people close to me?" (Jackson, 119). Pippa is stuck with an intense sense of uncanniness when she realizes that her close friend's father Elliot Ward was the secret older boyfriend of Andie. He was like a father figure for Pip. And she felt miserable when she got to know that he was partially responsible for the death of Andie. Thus, he ends up to be one of the antagonists of the novel. Pip felt more distant with him when he confesses that, to cover up his faults, he killed Sal and framed him as a murderer. Pip's uncanny emotion towards Elliot Ward is clearly conveyed from her confrontation with him at the near end of the novel.

'Pip had no pity for the man before her. Eleven years of memories dissolve from him, leaving a stranger standing in the room with her.' (Jackson, 386).

The protagonist also faces other problems which almost stops her investigation. She was blackmailed by the Elliot Ward and one other murderer of Andie, as she got very near to the truth. Pippa is constantly threatened by the murderers, but Pip ignores those threatening messages. And

in order to stop Pip, the murderer kidnaps her dog Barney. The killer asks Pip to destroy every evidence and information she gathers from her investigation if she wishes to have her dog back. Pip's agony is revealed in the scene where she demolishes her investigation materials as per the instruction given by the murderer. This incident psychologically frightens Pip and she decides to drop the project.

Pip's decision of dropping her project did not last for long because Ravi convinces her to continue the investigation. Even after her resignation from the case she could not accept the fact that the real killer is out free, while all the burdens of murder are placed on Sal Singh. After the death of Sal, his family suffers many cruel treatments from the town's people. People in Kilton town treat Singh's place as a haunted house and paint their house with abusive words. Ravi is forced to drop out of the school because he is labeled as a murderer's brother. The ostracisation of their family is revealed in several scenes of the novel. It was easy for the town people to believe that Sal should be the killer because he is the most convenient answer for both the police and the people. Sal's identity as an Indian makes the accusation more fitting for the story. This prejudiced thinking of the people is revealed through the interview of Pip with Stanley Forbes from the Kilton Mail newspaper. When Pip asked him what made him convince that Sal was the killer, he states that,

'Almost too many to list. Evidence aside, he was the boyfriend, right? And it's always the boyfriend or the ex-boyfriend. Not only that. Salil was Indian.'

(Jackson, 29)

From the above line it is evident that Sal being a murderer is the most convenient story for everyone but in truth Elliot Ward killed Sal and made it look like a suicide out of guilt. Thus, everyone in the town treated them badly. Pip wants to prove Sal's innocence both for her own self-satisfaction and for the Sal family's wellbeing. These two things act as her motivation to solve the mystery in Andie's death. Pip tries to get out of her emotional imbalance through her motivation. At the end of the novel, she feels satisfied only after the revelation of truth about the real murderer of Andie. The protagonist is trapped inside a mental turmoil until she finds her way out of it with the discovery of true killer.

The protagonist of the novel, Pip, when viewed in the light of Self-Determination Theory, it is found that there are two types of motivation which drives people towards their goal. They are intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to one doing something or engaging in an activity because they find it inherently interesting and enjoyable, while extrinsic motivation involves doing something to earn a reward or avoid punishment from external sources. Intrinsically motivated people are naturally curious and eager to learn. They persist in their task despite obstacles. These types of people often take the initiative to start and complete their task on their own. They are fueled by genuine enjoyment and passion for their work. Intrinsically motivated individuals focus on mastering skills and achieving personal growth and they set goals for personal satisfaction rather than external rewards.

Pip's behavior mirrors that of an intrinsically motivated person in several ways. The protagonist's curiosity and eagerness towards learning drives her to investigate Andie's case purely out of interest rather than for external rewards. This intrinsic motivation acts as her force for relentless persistence and determination, as she continues her work despite numerous struggles and dangers. Her self-initiative is evident as she independently takes on the case and the true passion for uncovering the mystery. Pip's enjoyment towards the investigative process

keeps her engaged and focused. In addition to that, her meticulous approach to research and problem solving reflects her desire for mastery and personal growth. Guided by strong personal goal-oriented mindset, Pip is dedicated to solving the mystery and seeking justice, embodying the key characteristics of intrinsic motivation. It is evident that Pip is an intrinsically motivated individual.

Pip's motivation nearly caused her life. When Pip discovered that Andie's sister, Becca Bell was the real murderer of Andie. She goes to her house to face Becca directly and enquires her about Andie's death. Becca at last confessed what happened that night when Andie disappears. Becca and Andie's relationship was strained from the beginning itself; they were not the loving sisters who would support each other on difficult times. Yet, Becca needed her sister's love on that specific night, as she was going through something very terrible. Andie returns home with a fatal blow on the back of her head, which came from her encounter with Elliot Ward. When Becca tried to talk with Andie, she just ignored her concerns which deeply affected Becca's mental stability. Becca did not kill Andie directly but when she fell to the ground choking from the after effect of her injury, Becca did not even try to help Andie. She just stood there watching her sister struggling to breathe. Only after Andie stopped breathing, Becca came to her senses but it was too late for any actions. Thus, she took Andie's motionless body out of the house and put it in the septic tank. Pip listened to Becca's confession without judging, she had no intention of turning Becca over to the police. But while narrating the incident, Becca skips Pip's drink with some toxic drug. Becca tries to kill Pip because she was afraid that Pip will disclose her dark secrets to the world. At the last-minute Pip is saved by Ravi, but even in that situation Pip thinks, what happened to Becca was unfair. This proves that Pip's motivation is not driven by any exterior rewards. She does not expect any kind of outer response from her confrontation with Becca, completing her project or securing justice. If Pip wanted any of those rewards she would have tried to contact the police right after she discovered Becca's secret. Hence this incident clearly justifies Pip's intrinsic motivation, as she confirms the identity of Andie's killer not to claim exterior rewards but to satisfy her own self-satisfaction.

As Pippa Fitz-Amobi has intrinsic motivation, she does not feel content even after her justification of Sal's innocence through her investigation. Pip confronts Elliot Ward and he confesses his wrong doings from being a secret older boyfriend of Andie to murdering Sal, which clears Sal's name out of the murder suspect. Elliot Ward unintentionally push Andie, when Andie tried to brag into his house and began to threaten him that she will destroy his passed wife's paintings, if he does not yield to her request. After that incident Andie disappeared and Elliot Ward out of desperation of getting caught by the police framed Sal as a murderer of Andie and killed him. Even after all his effort of framing and killing Sal, Elliot's fear did not subside. He was constantly in the fear that Andie might return to the town one day and reveal his dirty truth. So, when he came to encounter with one girl who looked more like Andie, he convinced himself that it was the real Andie Bell and put her locked in his guest house for past five years.

After the true personality of Eliot Ward had been revealed, the police reopened Andie's death case. Elliot Ward was partially responsible for Andie Bell's death, but the real killer was found out much later in the novel. Pip was supposed to step down from the case, but instead of feeling content she finds herself delving in Andie Bell's death. One fine evening Ravi and Pip's family plan to watch the fire work festival together and as Pip is getting ready her thoughts again drift towards Andie's unsolved mystery. Without her knowing, she takes out Andie's murder

board again and began to connect the missing leads in an effort to find the real killer. This event clearly represents Pip's intrinsic motivation as she is completely resolved to solve the mystery without any materialistic gain. Pip and Ravi both work together to solve the riddle of Andie and Sal's death. But Pip's goal is slightly different from Ravi. Ravi's goal is to prove Sal's innocence to the world and to clear the bad reputation of their family and when his goal was fulfilled he gladly steps down from the investigation. In the case of Pip, she also had the same goal as Ravi but when the time came she could not back down from the case like Ravi, which shows her unfulfilled ambition. If she had an extrinsic motivation she would have felt satisfied after the revelation of Sal's innocence and his murderer, like Ravi. But she does not feel satisfied because she did not expect any exterior rewards. Pip's motivation plays a major role in the revelation of truth. When the truth is unveiled, she feels an immense satisfaction. The revealed truth itself performs a therapeutic effect for her to escape emotional imbalance.

The term Therapeutic effect refers to a response following any type of treatment, the results of which are presumed to be useful or favorable. This holds true regardless of whether the outcome was anticipated, surprising, or even an unintended consequence. In the novel *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*, the protagonist experiences this therapeutic effect when she finally unravels the real murderer of Andie. Self-determination theory states that,

‘a basic need, whether it be a physiological need (Hull, 1943) or a psychological need, is an energizing state that, if satisfied, conduces toward health and well-being but, if not satisfied, contributes to pathology and ill-being’ (Ryan, Deci, 74)

It is evident from these lines that Pip could not feel normal as her need or desire to solve the mystery was not fulfilled even after the revelation of Sal's innocence. And she finally came out of her psychological imbalance when her desire was fulfilled. She seems to be in psychological chaos up to the near end of the novel, only when the truth is finally revealed and confirmed to her, she feels content and satisfied. Thus her satisfaction after the revelation of truth plays a therapeutic effect for her to break free from her emotional upheaval.

## CONCLUSION

In the novel *A Good Girl's Guide To Murder*, uncanny elements have been profoundly portrayed through characters. The central figure of the novel faces many hardships and trails, while proceeding with her project. Despite all her emotional struggle, she perseveres to finish her work for the case of her own self-satisfaction. People can be motivated for two things one is for external prize and other is for their own self-satisfaction. Pippa Fitz-Amobi is an intrinsically motivated person who successfully solves the mystery mainly for her own self-satisfaction. And that self-satisfaction itself provides her with a therapeutic effect resulting in her getting out of her emotional displeasure. Thus the novel gives a clear view of the protagonist's journey towards her psychological turmoil, her resilience nature which helps her to survive in the midst of threats and emotional instability and finally her way to healing which ultimately comes from her self-satisfaction.

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[https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/sdt/documents/2000\\_ryandeci\\_sdt.pdf](https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/sdt/documents/2000_ryandeci_sdt.pdf).

## **RETAILORED PERSONA: UNVEILING THE ECHO OF TRAUMA IN *THE SILENT PATIENT* BY ALEX MICHAELIDES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Exploring the impact of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, specifically analyzed within the context of characters in Alex Michaelides' The Silent Patient, this research paper delves into the profound alteration's trauma can induce within individuals, leading to significant changes in their behaviors, emotions, and personas. Further, the research focuses on the morphological changes trauma and PTSD induce in the brain, which in turn contribute to the persona change. The crux of the paper is to highlight the fact that persona change of an individual is not always a conscious decision but can also be an involuntary transformation caused by the suppressed memories and emotions. By combining literary analysis and psychological interpretations, the research calls attention to the radical impact of unresolved trauma on mental health and personal identity.*

### **METHODOLOGY**

The theoretical framework of this research centers on psychological theories related to trauma, PTSD, and their effects on human behavior and mental health. It draws upon concepts from persona theory, psychoanalytic theories of trauma, neurobiological perspectives on trauma and memory, as well as emotional and psychological responses to traumatic events. The method employed in this research is literary analysis combined with psychological interpretation. The analysis involves closely examining character dynamics, plot elements, and psychological states within the novel *The Silent Patient* to illustrate the impact of trauma on persona alteration. It integrates textual evidence and critical exploration to unravel the psychological complexities of trauma-induced persona changes in the characters.

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Persona is the mask or image we present to the world, that is designed to make a particular impression on others, while concealing our true nature - "the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor" (Jung. *Archetypes* 20). It is widely said and believed that the face is the index of the mind. But human beings have mastered the art of concealing. Whatever is seen or perceived to be the persona of a person is the quality that the person wants the world to see. The devil inside stays hidden and people cover its presence with an angelic smile. "There's the private persona and the public persona and the two shall never meet," said Liev Schreiber, American actor and director.

But at times the cultured and civilized self is distorted by the unannounced upheaval of the concealed emotional surge. And the mask that is protected and presented gets torn, revealing the real state of self. Often, trauma plays a great deal in the revealing process.

Life is short or long; boring or enticing, entirely relying on the onlooker's perspective. However, getting off the womb and each day forward is a step closer to the grave. On the way to grave, people desire to achieve and leave beautiful memories for the next generation to remember. And that is what people work for all their life. With this remaining as the priority, certain events

tend to change the hierarchy of the set priority. For instance, when there comes a situation where surviving is all that matters, dreams, achievements, fame, and name, everything and anything falls behind. The urge to survive beats the rest. This is when the animal within takes charge proving survival of the fittest. William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* gives us an instance of the same. Though the situations and events may vary from person to person, this proves that "for there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open" – Luke 8:17. (The Bible, NIV).

Once the true self is revealed, the world finds it difficult to accept and that is when the comments "You have changed"; "You are not the same anymore"; "We can't recognize you anymore"; "Are you the one we used to know?" starts flowing in. Nothing stays the same after that in the life of the person concerned.

This paper intends to explain the role played by trauma in retailoring the persona and thus impacting the life of the person concerned, with the aid of the perfect thriller, as stated by A J Finn, *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, a British Cypriot author and screenwriter who studied psychotherapy for three years and worked for two years at a secure unit for young adults. This experience provided him with material and inspiration for his debut novel *The Silent Patient*, published on 5 February 2019.

The plotline of *The Silent Patient* revolves around the character of Alicia Berenson, a renowned painter, who after a traumatic event involving her husband, falls into silence and is diagnosed with selective mutism, and that of Theo Faber, the psychotherapist who treated Alicia Berenson after her downfall. The novel has mirrored the troubled minds of the characters, enabling an easy and engrossing analysis of the same.

The novel deals with characters who exhibit a change of persona owing to various factors of life. One among them is trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. The change brought on the persona of the characters is so tremendous that it makes them unrecognizable. This paper will explain what brings in the change; what happens to the psychology and the physiology of the person? and how does the change affect the persona?

The word 'persona' refers to a theatrical mask worn by the actors to depict the character they played in the play. The usage of the word dates back to Latin Civilization. It is explained by Latin etymologists that persona comes from 'per/sonare' as 'the mask through which (per) resounds the voice (of the actor)'. (Wikipedia, np).

The word was brought into the realm of psychology by Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist. Jung's psyche model places persona between ego and society. Where ego being the center of consciousness responsible for the continuing sense of identity throughout life and persona is the social mask that is put on to meet the demands and standards set by the society to live as a cultured and civilized citizen. The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual. (Jung. *Two Essays* 264).



### Jung's Model of the Psyche

Alicia the protagonist of the novel is accused of mariticide. But Theo Faber, the narrator and, of the novel claims that she was not the same before. He describes her as dazzling, fascinating, and full of life. Paul, Alicia's cousin too states, "Well, she wasn't like that at all. She wasn't a violent person." (*TSP* 146). But Alicia ended up killing her husband Gabriel, whom she loved the most. As the novel moves it is evident that the love between Alicia and Gabriel never descended. They loved and supported each other. They were happy together. Yet Alicia brutally killed him.

... A gun was on the floor. Next to it, in the shadows, Gabriel was seated, motionless, bound to a chair with wire wrapped around his ankles and wrists. At first the officers thought he was alive. His head was lolling slightly to one side, as if he were unconscious. Then a beam of light revealed Gabriel had been shot several times in the face. His handsome features were gone forever, leaving a charred, blackened, bloody mess. The wall behind him was sprayed with fragments of skull, brains, hair – and blood.

Blood was everywhere – splashed on the walls, running in dark rivulets along the floor, along the grain of the wooden floorboards. ... (*TSP* 8,9).

After all this, Alicia showed no sign of remorse or guilt. This raises the question, what changed her and how can she be so heartless?

Alicia was a single child to her parents. But unfortunately, her mother commits suicide by crashing her car into a wall. Though Alicia was also in the car, she survived while her mother Eva died. A ten-year-old child who barely escaped death must be scared to death and will be in a very fragile state of mind. Adding to the misery, Alicia overhears her father Vernon while hiding with Paul, her cousin, in their secret hideout filled with the aroma of Jasmine as he said "My girl," he kept saying, 'my poor girl, my Eva ... Why did she have to die? Why did it have to be her? Why didn't Alicia die instead?' and Alicia whispered something to me (Paul)—I'll never forget it. 'He killed me' she said. 'Dad just—killed me.'" (*TSP* 271).

The same scenario repeats with Gabriel. An intruder comes in and ties both Alicia and Gabriel to a chair and he threatens to kill them. Alicia pleads not to kill them. But the intruder wanted them to make a choice – who lives and who dies. She was ready to die for him or with him. In her last moments (as she thought it would be) she told Gabriel that she loved him and asked him to say that he loved her. As if she wanted to die hearing those words from him. But to her surprise, the words she heard falling out of Gabriel's mouth killed her then and there and brought back the traumatic day of her childhood to the present.

... And then Gabriel spoke. I didn't recognize his voice at first. Such a tiny voice, so far away—a little boy's voice. A small child—with the power of life and death at his fingertips.



“I don’t want to die,” he said.

Then there was silence. Everything stopped. Inside my body, every cell deflated; wilting cells, like dead petals falling from a flower. Jasmine flowers floating to the ground. Can I smell jasmine somewhere? Yes, yes, sweet jasmine—on the windowsill perhaps ... (*TSP* 324).

As the memories of the painful past rushed in, Alicia killed both the people who killed her - her father and her husband, whom she thought loved her. But the question still stands. How can she kill him just because he said “I don’t want to die”? Death scares even the bravest. No one is willing to die for anybody else. That’s why while defining the threshold of love Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” – John 15:13 (*The Bible*, NIV). Why couldn’t Alicia remain calm? Alicia who was known to be silent and calm, became violent. Why? With the murder not only did Gabriel lose his life, Alicia lost hers as well. Alicia lost everything. She lost her career and her reputation. She ended up locked in a psychiatric hospital. She lost her self. With so much to lose, why did she do it? The once dazzling, fascinating, and life-filled Alicia is no more. Why? The later pages of the novel reveal the answer – Trauma.

To understand Alicia and how trauma changes the persona of a person, it is essential to obtain a clear picture of what trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are. Trauma refers to an emotional or psychological response to an extremely distressing or disturbing event or experience. It's often characterized by feelings of intense fear, helplessness, horror, or a sense of being overwhelmed. It can be defined as any event that injures a person’s psychological, social, and or physical being,” states Jennifer Gerlach (“The Ubiquity of Trauma”). Injuries don’t necessarily have to be physical; they can be emotional as well. Emotional and psychological injuries are at times more vicious compared to physical injuries.

Trauma can result in severe and long-lasting effects if not resolved. In the words of Peter Levine, developer of the somatic experiencing approach for trauma treatment, “Traumatic symptoms are not caused by the triggering event itself. They stem from the frozen residue of energy that has not been resolved and discharged; this residue remains trapped in the nervous system where it can wreak havoc on our bodies and spirits” (*Waking the Tiger* 19). What makes the event traumatic is not the event itself, but the impact the event had on the person involved. “Trauma is defined not by what happened in the past, but by how those events became present experience,” says Santiago Delboy (“Trauma is an Experience”). And this is what is referred to as PTSD. According to Sidran Institute, around 20% of people who experience traumatic events will develop PTSD, and women are twice as likely to develop PTSD than men. As stated in psychoanalytical theory, PTSD occurs as a response to an unresolved psychological problem. PTSD revives the trauma when triggered in the form of a flashback or any stressful event similar to the past traumatic event. Once the trauma is ignited the defense mechanisms of the body activate.

The human physiology is a wonderful work of art. The memory system of humans works expertly. The memory lane can be divided into three: Sensory memory, short-term memory (STM), and long-term memory (LTM). The sensory memory is very fragile and fades away after 0.3 seconds of perceiving. The short-term memory lasts for 20 seconds if the memory perceived in the sensory area is rehearsed enough. And if the memory in STM is rehearsed repeatedly it enters LTM. The memory in LTM lasts for months, years and, even a lifetime. Trauma is not remembered as the past nor is the memory rehearsed but repeated, re-lived, and re-enacted in the present.

When a person is expressing something stressful or dangerous, all the senses become alert to protect the person, which in turn results in perceiving everything. And this event or

memory becomes unforgettable. When the person encounters something similar to the original stressful event the mind considers it as the same harmful event and works against it to protect the person. The primary defense mechanisms are designed to keep the person safe with the help of past memories. But with trauma, the brain wanting to keep the person safe works over time. It over-relies on the memories of the past and creates a sense of danger in the present.

“Psychic trauma or the memory of the same acts like a foreign body which even long after its penetration must be considered as an agent of the present” records Freud and Breuer (*Studies in Hysteria*).

While experiencing traumatic events, the brain shuts down all non-essential systems and activates the sympathetic nervous system, and signals the activation of the survival mode. Once the danger has subdued, the para-sympathetic nervous system calms the person and the body. But in PTSD, the brain stays stuck in survival mode. “Post-traumatic stress from a neurobiological standpoint is not a disorder. It’s a re-ordering of neural networks and pathways and sensory pathways. So that the person can survive in a really dangerous situation,” says Janet Seahorn (“Understanding PTSD’s” 5:08-23).

Trauma and PTSD cause morphological changes in the body. Studies have proven that the sudden intense release of cortisol, a stress hormone can kill some hippocampal cells. Thus, the hippocampus is smaller in size and less active in people who are diagnosed with trauma. This creates memory problems and the person concerned finds it difficult to distinguish between past and present memory and this ends up keeping the person hyper-vigilant all the time. The prefrontal cortex also becomes less active which results in the slow learning of new information that helps to control fear. PTSD also shrinks the window of balance of the nervous system.

The brain has two parts namely the cerebral cortex and brain stem. The former is called the intelligent brain and the latter, the animal brain. When there comes a traumatic event posing a threat to the life of the person, the animal brain takes control. It turns off all other non-necessary activities and focuses only on surviving. Survival instinct is the most powerful instinct of humans or any other animals. As the animal brain works, it pays no attention to logical thinking and it works the fastest. Survival becomes the utmost priority.

With PTSD, the amygdala, the fire alarm of the brain keeps sending signals that the person is in danger as it is not able to differentiate between the danger then and the danger now, whenever it gets triggered, and releases the stress hormones- adrenaline and cortisol, that initiates the fight, flight or freeze response. This action is named by Daniel Goleman, a psychologist in his 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ* as ‘amygdala hijack’.

In the case of Alicia, the survival mode was on, as she was reminded of the traumatic incident where she felt threatened by her father. Hearing the words of Gabriel, Alicia’s defense mechanisms wanted to save her from the danger. This is much evident with the mention of the aroma of Jasmine in both incidents. She was hiding with her cousin which was filled with the aroma of Jamine when she heard her dad wishing that she were dead instead of his wife and she felt that she smelled Jamine when Gabriel threw her under the bus. The smell is the evidence that her memory took over her present. Also, when the freeze mode is on, the person experiences symptoms of depression, numbness, disconnection, fatigue, and gets slow. This explains why Alicia showed no remorse or guilt and went into silent mode.

She was always scared of death. She was scared that she might commit suicide like her mother. But she strived hard to overcome that. She couldn’t accept or bear the injury caused by the two people who were so close to her. For any girl, the husband is the extended image of the father. In Alicia’s life, this seemed true as well but negatively. When her trauma was triggered, she could see both her father and her husband in front of her, wanting her dead. The betrayal of

her loved ones triggered her to take revenge and protect herself. Back then as a child, she was defenseless and could do nothing to protect her. But now she can and she did. Thus, her persona retailored.

Alicia was also a victim of depression. She admits that she was not good with words. She talked less and there is no sign in the novel that she made friends except Jean-Felix, the manager of her art gallery. Paul, her cousin states the same about her, that she is a very silent one. The prolonged depression that Alicia bore in silence had led her to suppression. Where she suppressed all her thoughts, especially the negative ones. She prevented her from writing any negative thoughts in her diary and she also suppressed the sexual harassment she faced from Max Berenson, Gabriel's brother, to not hurt Gabriel's feelings. Except for writing the diary to make Gabriel feel at ease, there is no sign of Alicia having a mind-free conversation with anyone.

When she was stalked by a stranger, she tries to get help from her husband Gabriel but he doesn't believe her and takes her to a psychiatrist, Dr. West. Dr. West too didn't believe even a single word Alicia said and forced her to take medicine, as he believed that she was hallucinating. To keep herself sane and safe, Alicia suppressed even more. She acted in front of Gabriel and Dr. West. At one point she breaks in front of Barbie, her neighbor, but rather than letting the bottled emotions flow, she seals them very soon, though Barbie believed what she said.

She reached saturation by the words of Gabriel and the trauma in her got triggered. She got her combined revenge for the betrayal she faced. Betrayal makes a person lose their self and enforces confusion, worthlessness, and powerlessness in their mind. This is the other reason why she killed Gabriel and the father figure she saw in him. Though the suppression in her muted her from saying all these words loud, she expressed them via her painting which she named *Alcestis*.

*Alcestis* is the protagonist of the Athenian tragedy *Alcestis* by the ancient Greek playwright Euripides. *Alcestis* dies because of her husband's cowardness to face death. The betrayal she faced made her remain silent, although Hercules retrieved her from death and brought her back to her husband. In the case of Alicia, her father wanted Alicia to die because of her mother's cowardly decision to end her life and her husband wanted her to die because he didn't want to die. Both men betrayed her with their cowardliness and cheated on her feelings.

Not only Alicia but Theo Faber, the psychotherapist and the real villain of the novel is also a victim of trauma. He was inflicted with PTSD thanks to the violence and abuse he went through in his childhood under his father. He was always overshadowed by that. He tried running away but that didn't help him, as he could run away from home but not from his mind. Later with the help of Ruth, the psychotherapist, he found his way back. The entry of Kathy in his life started healing the hidden wound, PTSD. But when Kathy cheated on him with Gabriel, Alicia's husband, Theo was not able to bear the pain. He tried running away as usual but he couldn't. So, he decided to stay with her no matter what. He developed another disorder adding to PTSD i.e., Stockholm syndrome or Trauma Bond.

A trauma bond is defined as the development and course of strong emotional ties between persons where one person intermittently harasses, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other. It is also worth mentioning that Theo Faber's mother is also a victim of Trauma Bond. She stayed with her husband all through his physical and mental violence.

When Alicia took her revenge on both her father and her husband on her husband, Theo who has the mindset to do anything to protect himself from getting hurt, took his revenge by destroying the marriage of Alicia, because he couldn't bear to hurt Kathy, whom he loved so much and couldn't imagine her leaving him. And poor Alicia ended up paying a huge price for Theo's revenge.

The persona of the characters of the novel *The Silent Patient* goes through a drastic change to the extent that they murder because of the underlying trauma. A well-known painter and a talented and compassionate psychotherapist became murderers. Trauma is an emotion. Emotions come from thinking, not situations. Therefore, it is essential to take good care of mental health and seek professional aid when necessary. Alicia is also a victim of medical ill-practice, where the psychotherapist, Dr. West ignored the severity of her condition and focused only on money.

Trauma isn't incurable. It can be soothed and the person can get rid of that dark song that is stuck and rings in his/her head again and again. But one must be ready to be cured for which a supporting family and environment is very essential. Treating mind is nothing to be ashamed of. Also, people must acquire knowledge on trauma and PTSD as it is rising out to be one of the most popular silent killers. As Maya Angelou said, "When we know better, we do better" (OWN 2:08). Once reversed it is difficult and sometimes impossible to retrieve the lost persona. So, it is best to protect it before losing it.

"Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" – Oscar Wilde ("The Critic as Artist" 182).

## CONCLUSION

This research offers an in-depth exploration of how trauma influences and reshapes personas. It sheds light on the intricate relationship between trauma, psychological responses, and the transformation of individual identities. Furthermore, the paper highlights the relevance of psychological theories in understanding and interpreting the complexities of human behavior, specifically in the context of trauma-induced alterations in personas. It emphasizes the importance of mental health awareness and the impact of unresolved trauma on individual well-being.

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## THE MAD PRIDE SLOGAN OF “NO FORCED TREATMENT EVER” IN RESHMA

### VALLIAPPAN’S *FALLEN, STANDING: MY LIFE AS A SCHIZOPHRENIST*

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In the late summer of 2003, six people gathered at a small building in Pasadena, California and starved themselves for twenty-two days. The small group of hunger strikers were later joined by over a dozen “solidarity strikers” around the world. Their strike was about “human rights in mental health”. The hunger strikers faced the possibility of being labeled ‘mad’. They protest the ‘international domination’ of biological approaches to psychiatry and the ever-increasing and widespread use of prescription drugs to treat ‘mental and emotional crisis’ (Mind Freedom 28, 2003). Isn’t Psychiatry a Science? Shouldn’t scientific questions be decided in laboratories and in peer-reviewed articles filled with graphs and statistical analysis?. The hunger strikers took the risk because, indeed they are mad. They are all members of joePiula psychiatry disability activist group known as “Mad Pride”.

The Mad Pride activist group is an international coalition devoted to resisting and critiquing clinician-centered psychiatric systems, finding alternative and peer run approaches to mental health recovery, and helping those who wish to do so minimize their involvement with current psychiatric institutions. They affectionately call themselves “Mad Pride” because they believe mainstream psychiatry over exaggerates psychic pathology and over enforces psychic conformity in the guise of diagnostic labeling and treatment—which all too often comes in the form of forced or manipulated hospitalizations, restraints, seclusions, and medications. Like the reappropriate uses of the terms “Crip,” “Queer,” and “Black Pride,” the term “Mad Pride” overturns traditional distinctions and hierarchies. It signifies a reversal of standard pathological connotations of “madness.” Rather than pathologizing mental difference, “Mad Pride” signifies a stance of respect, appreciation, and affirmation.

Reshma Valliappan is a founder-director of Mind Arcs and The Red Door that work on breaking barriers between normalcy and madness, along with a platform that advocates for the rights of persons with mental illness. She was elected Ashoka Fellow in 2014, and received the WIN Woman of the Year Award, 2012-2013, in Pune. She is also an INK Fellow. *A Drop of Sunshine*, a film made on Reshma’s recovery was screened in 2011. Reshma is currently pursuing a double master’s in Philosophy and Science and Religion but, as she says “.... I really honestly spend time doing tandavas in the rain with Thor and engaging in fictitious tantric encounters with the dead. And spent at least three hours a day with my cats learning their moves and drives to become a kick-ass samurai ninja.”(1)

*Fallen, Standing: My Life as a Schizophrenist* (2015) does not have a conventional beginning, middle and end. It was sent as a series of emails, accompanied by text, every week- or every few weeks or months, depending. It was often interrupted. It rambled and digressed, was mostly in first person, but sometimes in third. It followed no predictable chronology. It is

presented in the book more or less as it came. Emails have been reproduced as is, if they anticipated or described states of mind or incidents that were important and needed to be communicated. No attempt has been made to impose an 'order' on it, and some sequence of events may seem confusing. The form and fluency of the narrative, its stops and starts, its interruptions are part of the author's story.

*Fallen, Standing : My Life as a Schizophrenist* is a personal life writing of a 15 year old girl, who was taken to a hospital by her parents, straight from the school with her uniform, without informing her where they are going, often with the common word of 'shut-up' for a don't-care-attitude, short hair cut, run away from home, dressing like a boy, smoking and so on. The first discussion of her inner changes with the doctor leads her to hate her parents to the extent of her thought of killing them. The doctor speaks: "So...this...that...boy...girl...you...become...boy...sex change...human figures...parents... blah blah blah! (13). No conversation enters within her mind, she feels cheated by her parents of not informing prior and asking the willingness to meet the doctor. She feels forced and wishes to run away from the hospital. The doctor conveys:

A transvestite: A boy caught in a girl's body who likes girls OR a girl caught in a boy's body who likes boys. You are like the first one. You like girls. But you are not a lesbian. You are a boy caught in a girl's body and that is why you dress like that and sit and talk the way you do. You want to be with a girl, but as a boy and not as a girl. There is therapy for this and once you are 18 you can decide if you want to go in for a sex change. There are plenty of people like you. ( 15)

The novel is divided into two parts, Part I is about Reshma's diagnosis with paranoid schizophrenia at the age of 22. The very fact that there is schizophrenia in the family entailed not being invited to many functions or gatherings. Friends stopped wanting to socialize with her family. Reshma remembers asking her parents "Am I that bad and horrible a person? Why don't they talk to me?". Reshma reflects on an incident how she was asked for a fitness certificate and letters to pursue her higher studies from her treating psychiatrist, counsellor, support group and care givers stating that " I won't be a threat to myself or to others".

Reshma knows she is different but she does not know how and she is not capable of saying it either. She finds multiple persons talking to her, within her and asking her to do things which is suppressed inside her from her childhood. Reshma's one of the personalities asks her to cut her hand: "I sat down beside her but she still didn't see me. She was engrossed in cutting herself. Her right arm had several cuts on it, some healed, some fresh. I kept trying to make conversation with her but she just didn't respond.... That's when I noticed- it was my right arm that was bleeding...(92).

The childhood trauma has painted a picture of what is wrong with the expectation of developed society upon her youth. Reshma questions the tendency of how the society and family labels anyone who dances to their own whims and tunes as disturbed, mentally ill, abnormal, disordered, inadequate forcing them into correctional or medical treatment. Her personal experiences scream the invisible need that adolescents have to feel wanted and accepted exactly as ' they are'. Reshma hears multiple voices within her and as years pass by:

The voices were getting louder and louder.... My alter egos have been up to nonsense again. One just had a fight with Shadow and switched on the light and killed it! The other is glaring in the mirror wondering where Reflection has gone, only to see that the other ego has tied Reflection to Shadow to create an illusion of double shadows. Some twisted egos I have. Apparently, they are planning for Halloween... which happens every day and not just on October 31<sup>st</sup>. (143)

Part II of the novel discusses Reshma's recovery and life without medication at the age of 30. The thoughts that she had when she was suffering compels her to give tips to be followed on how to treat the mentally ill. Her understanding of her own self is given in points like commandments: *My understanding of Maslow's self-actualization versus today's psychology and diagnosis.*

16. *I am not a disturbed, rebellious person, I just listen to my own feelings in evaluating experiences instead of the voice of tradition or authority or the majority.*
17. *I do not have a personality disorder, my views just don't coincide with those of the majority.*
18. *I am not schizophrenic, I just perceive reality differently and can tolerate uncertainty.*

*Etiquette for practitioners when treating a person with mental illness.*

19. *When I walk in don't ask my carers, 'How is she?'. You can look at me and ask me directly. I'm a person first, then your patient.*
20. *When deciding my treatment don't ignore me and take confirmation from my carers and expect me to sit and agree.*

*A letter to carers from a person with mental illness;*

1. *When I manage to complete simple things like grooming, try not to keep clapping every time but encourage me to go out instead. I am not incapable. I just have difficulties sometimes.*
2. *You want to see me happy, settled and fine. I can only achieve all that thru' patience, support and encouragement. My heart and mind cannot be forced, like any other.*

Reshma Valliappan questions the very system which refused to identify and understand her inner struggles. She says:

"Schizophrenia is not a mental illness to me. It is not a brain disease. It is a word that has sent shivers down anyone's spine faster than the bogeyman. I intentionally use the word 'schizophrenist', not because I want to flaunt the label but because I want people to know that they can come up with any label out there and throw it at me and I will still find a way to own it, use it and turn its entire meaning over. This to me is schizophrenia. As disturbing as the experience of it is, it is only that- an experience. Just another way to be and to exist." (260)

Reshma feels that disability may affect any person and same is the case with mental ill-health. Can we find a person who does not feel anger, pain, paranoia, grief, depression, sadness, overwhelming happiness alternative sexuality and lifestyles or encounter traumatic moments in their life?. Every single individual is prone to mental health conflict at some point in their life, which means they too can come under a psychiatry diagnosis. A majority of diagnoses are made out of malpractice. The madness does not lie in the person affected but among the people around



them, in society, families, the system at large. The only reality that is theirs “is their madness...which no one, no law, no blood, no amount of pain or love can take away. That becomes their dignity...to live with the madness and to die with it...!” (Xiii)

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# THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS ON MENTAL WELL-BEING: INSIGHTS FROM '*STRANGERS FROM HELL*'

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## ABSTRACT

*Humans, as social beings, are deeply influenced by their interactions with others. Our daily encounters can have profound effects on our lives, shaping our thoughts, emotions, and overall well-being. While traumatic experiences are often associated with mental health issues, it's crucial to recognize the significant impact that interpersonal relationships can also have on our mental state. The Korean psychological thriller "Strangers from Hell" (2019) effectively explores this concept, highlighting how the people around us can exert immense influence on our thoughts and actions, potentially leading to both positive and negative outcomes.*

*The series delves into the complexities of human psychology, demonstrating how our social environments can shape our beliefs, behaviours, and even our identities. Through its compelling narrative, "Strangers from Hell" invites us to consider the profound ways in which our relationships can both nurture and harm us. By understanding the power of interpersonal influence, we can cultivate healthier social connections and foster greater resilience in the face of life's challenges.*

## KEYWORDS

*Strangers from hell, Jong Joon-Woo, Idols of the Cave, Naturalism, Mental health issues.*

## INTRODUCTION

Movies have been an integral part of our lives, providing entertainment, inspiration, and emotional experiences. While we often appreciate the surface-level effects of films on our moods and perspectives, we may overlook their subtle yet profound influence on our minds and behaviours. Many people have discussed the psychological impact of movies, yet we continue to seek out new films for relaxation.

One series that profoundly influenced my understanding of the power of interpersonal relationships is the Korean drama "Strangers from Hell." This psychological thriller, based on a webtoon by Ki Yong-ki, aired from August 31 to October 6, 2019, and stars Im Si-wan as Yoon Jong-woo and Lee Dong-wook as Seo Moon-Jo. Written by Jung Yo-do and directed by Lee Chang-hee, the series focuses on Yoon Jong-woo, a young aspiring writer in his 20s who moves to Seoul from the countryside after his senior from his hometown, Jae Ho, offers him a job, whose life takes a dramatic turn after encountering strange neighbours.

*"The psychological aspect of the drama would hit anyone harder though there will be many questions which would be left unanswered as there are considerable number of loopholes in the*

*story. Chill ran down my spine when the last scene was shown. Many things became clear like crystal.*

*The story might be unrealistic yet the caliginous psychological aspect is the reality within us which mostly goes unspoken. Human beings are the scariest – that was the main theme. Our mind always get stuck in the fact that some invisible being would scare the soul out of us but how dangerous human can be we forget many a times. No wonder the insanely eerie expressions and feeling every character of the studio exuded was utterly frightening.” (aimsat, Review, October 7, 2019)*

This study begins with the impact of environment on mental well-being and a review from a viewer who shared their perspective on *Strangers from Hell*, a psychological thriller that delves into how humans can be far more frightening than external forces. This drama highlights the powerful influence people can have on each other—whether positive or negative—and how these interactions shape individual mental states. Through this lens, the series explores the profound effect that one's surroundings and the people within them can have on mental health.

Yoon Jong-woo, struggling to find affordable housing after moving to Seoul, moves into a dormitory where he soon notices the peculiar behaviour of his fellow tenants such as his next-door neighbour Seo Moon Jo, a dentist. Despite his initial discomfort, he dismisses their eccentricities as unimportant. However, as he experiences increasingly unsettling events, including being watched and followed, Yoon Jong-woo becomes consumed by fear and paranoia. He seeks help from his senior and girlfriend but is met with disbelief and dismissal. Isolated and alone, he gradually succumbs to the darkness within the building, transforming from a hopeful young man into a troubled individual.

"Strangers from Hell" explores the complexities of human psychology, the fear of the unknown, and the explicit impact of our surroundings on our mental state. The series subverts expectations by portraying a human being as the most terrifying villain, highlighting the potential for darkness within even the most ordinary individuals.

By focusing on the character of Yoon Jong-woo, the drama effectively captures the ways in which our interactions with others can shape our thoughts, behaviours, and ultimately, our identities. It serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of isolation and the importance of healthy social connections.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Edward McCann and Sylvia Huntley-Moore's: "Madness in the movies: An evaluation of the use of cinema to explore mental health issues in nurse education, Nurse Education in Practice"**

To gain insights into public perceptions of mental health, particularly as portrayed in movies, McCann and Moore conducted an online survey using Survey Monkey. By collecting and analysing responses from nursing students, they were able to leverage their informed understanding of mental health to explore the impact of movies on public perception.

The research aimed to assess students' ability to analyse, compare, and contrast the effects of movies on mental health. McCann and Moore discovered that movies can serve as valuable platforms for studying various mental health issues and understanding their underlying causes. The study provided an opportunity to reflect on students' attitudes and behaviours, using the mental health issues depicted in movies as a teaching and learning tool to address real-life situations.

### **Aleksandar Damjanović's: "Psychiatry and Movies"**

Movies are a form of artistic expression, requiring significant creativity and effort from directors and other filmmakers. While they are often appreciated for their entertainment value, some movies or series can be psychologically disturbing to certain viewers.

In his paper, Damjanović explores the effects of such artistically challenging films on individuals with mental health issues, using examples like "Psycho" and "The Exorcist," which, despite their popularity, can be unsettling. He also discusses the stereotypical representation of mentally ill individuals in movies, often portrayed as either serial killers or objects of suspicion.

The paper "Psychiatry and Movies" focuses on the portrayal of mental illness in films and its potential impact on viewers' mental health.

### **Debra Umberson and Jennifer Karas montez's: "Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy"**

As mentioned in my abstract, this article examines the positive and negative influences of social interactions on individuals in their daily lives and conversations. Positive impacts include emotional support, idea sharing, and collaboration, while negative impacts encompass conflict, stress, and peer pressure among teenagers.

This article focuses on the impact of social interactions on people's behaviours and attitudes in their daily lives. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of positive social interactions for mental well-being and effective functioning. However, neglecting these interactions can lead to a loss of self.

"Social networks refer to the web of social relationships surrounding an individual, including the type and strength of each relationship.

These aspects of social relationships significantly affect health." (Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy)

## **DISCUSSION**

When discussing 'Mental Health,' the focus often falls on personal trauma or the pressures an individual faces in various aspects of life. However, it is equally crucial to consider the influence of one's environment. An individual's behaviour is often deeply shaped by their surroundings, which can affect them positively or negatively. My paper will explore these themes through the KDrama *Strangers from Hell*, with a particular focus on the main character, Yoon Jong-Woo. He moves from a rural area to Seoul in search of better job prospects and an improved life, only to experience a decline in his mental stability due to unsettling encounters with his new neighbours.

"The Idols of the Cave are those which arise within the mind of the individual. For everyone has a cave or den of his own, which refracts and discolours the light of nature; owing either to his own proper and peculiar nature; or to his education and conversation with others; or to the reading of books, and the authority of those whom he esteems and admires; or to the different impressions which things make according as they meet with a mind predisposed and preoccupied, or calm and equal; and the like." (Bacon, Francis. *Novum Organum*. 1857)

Beginning with a quote from Francis Bacon on the impact of external influences on our behaviour and perception, shaped further by personal experiences and relationships, I aim to frame my paper around the idea that such influences can deeply alter personality, behaviour, and understanding. This concept, applied to real-life contexts, can even lead individuals to extreme psychological changes, including a loss of sanity, as seen in this case, which I will discuss in my paper.

When recalling on our own lives, we can all recall moments when we acted or spoke in ways that didn't quite align with our usual selves. This can serve as a basic example of how our interactions and the amount of time spent with different people influence aspects of our personality, speech, and behaviour. While this can be harmless or even positive, it becomes concerning when it leads to a harmful influence. This dynamic is vividly illustrated in *Strangers from Hell* through the character of Yong Joon-Woo, who undergoes profound changes under the influence of those around him.

Raised in a supportive family and driven by the desire for a better life, Yong Joon-Woo was determined to work hard to overcome financial struggles and build a successful future. Although his true passion lay in writing, he held onto his dream while prioritizing stability. With this resolve, he moved to Seoul, hoping to make something of himself. Through a connection with a senior from his hometown, he secured a job and began looking for an affordable place to stay. He eventually found one, though he could never have anticipated the unsettling chain of events that would follow.

When discussing Yong Joon-Woo's determination to succeed, it's also important to acknowledge his short-tempered nature. He has a strong aversion to being disrespected or treated as if he can be manipulated, and his time in the military left him with difficult memories that he finds hard to forget. These past experiences may have contributed to his tendency to anger quickly, particularly when faced with the unsettling behaviour of his neighbours. Although he felt fearful around them, his frustration and suppressed anger often simmered beneath the surface.

Joon-Woo found his neighbours' behaviour deeply unsettling. Whether he was in the dormitory, the kitchen, or any common area, he often felt as though he was being watched in a disturbingly invasive manner. Initially, he dismissed these sensations as effects of sleep deprivation, questioning if he was merely imagining things. However, whenever he confronted them about their invasive actions, the encounters left him feeling scared, angry, or questioning his own sanity. A striking example of this tension is evident in a rooftop conversation with Seo Moon-Jo, one of his neighbours, whose casual remarks subtly hinted at manipulation and tested Joon-Woo's sense of reality.

"You don't think you fit in here, do you? I'm different from these people What if I end up like them?" (*Strangers from Hell*, Episode 5. 2019)

This interaction highlights Moon-Jo's use of subtly manipulative language, intended to stir Joon-Woo's doubts about his own nature—suggesting he might share the same dark tendencies as his neighbors, potentially capable of violence. When Joon-Woo's paranoia and sense of being watched intensify, he seeks reassurance from his girlfriend, Min Ji-Eun. He confides, “People here are weird... I don't know who it is, but I think someone has been breaking into my room” (*Strangers from Hell*, Episode 4, 2019). However, Ji-Eun dismisses his concerns, advising him to focus on his job, implying he's not fully committed to his work. Agreeing, Joon-Woo tries to set his fears aside, though the unsettling environment continues to erode his mental stability.

As noted in the abstract, humans are inherently social beings, making it impossible to avoid interactions with others in our daily lives. This is evident in Joon-Woo's experiences, where he reluctantly engages with his colleagues and neighbours to foster cordial relationships and alleviate the discomfort of feeling constantly observed. His most significant interactions are with Seo Moon-Jo, a mysterious dentist who exhibits a keen interest in Joon-Woo and frequently confronts and taunts him. Moon-Jo's dialogue is meticulously crafted to manipulate and disorient Joon-Woo, instilling doubt about his reality and fostering feelings of isolation and paranoia. One particularly intense exchange exemplifies this dynamic:

*“You really wanted to kill him earlier, didn't you? You wanted to kill him when your girlfriend got out of his car. If you want to kill him, do it that's who you really are.”* (*Strangers from Hell*, Episode 8. 2019)

In a particularly provocative moment, Moon-Jo encourages Joon-Woo to succumb to his primal instincts, suggesting that he should kill Jae-Ho when Joon-Woo's girlfriend arrives in his car. Moon-Jo's words are artfully manipulative, causing Joon-Woo to question the distinction between his anger and the notion of being a killer. This dialogue exemplifies Moon-Jo's manipulative nature, as he compels Joon-Woo to confront his darker impulses. Gradually, as Joon-Woo absorbs Moon-Jo's twisted rhetoric, he begins to lose his grip on sanity.

This deterioration culminates in a profound transformation, leading Joon-Woo to become a serial killer, ultimately murdering all of his dormitory neighbours. When Joon-Woo confronts Moon-Jo about the extent of his actions, questioning why he would push him to such a breaking point, Moon-Jo's final remarks are equally manipulative. He insinuates that from the very beginning, he intended to mould Joon-Woo into a reflection of himself. The following dialogue captures the essence of Moon-Jo's last manipulation, illustrating the culmination of his influence over Joon-Woo and happy to be have been made Joon-Woo completely like him.

*“Let me ask you something, why do you do this?” “There is no reason. That's what people are made of, it's your instinct to chew each other out, when we're with one another, then grow tired as we watch them you and I will be together forever. I knew it, babe you are the best peace of artwork I created”* (*Strangers from Hell*, Episode 10. 2019)

As previously discussed, the influence of our surroundings on mental well-being is exemplified by how the behaviour of those around us can significantly affect our personalities and communication styles. While the extreme example presented in *Strangers from Hell* highlights the darker side of this influence, we often encounter subtler forms of impact in our daily lives.

Such interactions, though seemingly minor, can shape our thoughts, actions, and overall psychological state.

## CONCLUSION

As discussed in the paper on social contact, the character from the drama "Strangers from Hell" demonstrates how negative social interactions can lead to personal loss and mental health issues. Through the character of Yong Jung-woo, we witness the negative impact of associating with strange individuals. Society's disregard for mental health is evident when Yong Jung-woo seeks help from his senior and girlfriend but is met with disbelief and dismissal. While society is becoming more open about mental health issues, there remains a stigma associated with acknowledging them, leading to delayed intervention and potentially irreversible consequences. The negative influence of social interactions on mental health is prevalent in many characters in movies, series, and books, affecting both youth and older individuals. The Telugu movie "Rx 100," based on a true story, also portrays the detrimental effects of associating with the wrong people. Siva, a good man with no addictions, undergoes a drastic transformation after meeting Indu. Under her influence, Siva becomes addicted to alcohol, cigarettes, and sexual intercourse, ultimately leading to his tragic demise. While there are numerous examples of negative social influences, it's important to note that not everyone experiences the same consequences. Some individuals may thrive despite associating with negative people. This raises further questions and requires additional discussion.

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## JO MARCH AND THE APPEAL OF DIFFERENCES: EXPLORING 'OPPOSITES ATTRACT' IN *LITTLE WOMEN*

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### ABSTRACT

*The phrase “opposites attract” is commonly used by people everywhere. It is a conception that deals with the idea that two people who are polar opposites to each other make the best pair. Often times, contemporary works portray the same in their literature, which makes everyone think that the perfect partner would be someone who shares no similarities with themselves. Someone who has opposing values and ideals. This paper strives to show that this whole concept does not prove to be factual in reality. Through the example of Jo March, a free-spirited character in Little Women, and her relationship with Theodore Laurence “Laurie” and Friedrich Bhaer, this paper aims to show the invalidity of the whole “opposites attract” phrase.*

### KEYWORDS

*opposites attract, little women, Jo March and Bhaer*

### INTRODUCTION

Though the idea of opposites attracting is a popular trope in the realm of romance and literature, in real life, it becomes very difficult for a relationship to work out when the two partners have nothing in common. Examining the dynamics of companionship in real-time offers a different truth. It reveals that when two people are aligned and share similar values and ideals is when their relationship grows and becomes stronger.

In *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott’s contrasting portrayals of Jo’s relationship with Laurie versus Jo’s relationship with Friedrich Bhaer goes on to show that while there may be an initial phase of attraction when two people are opposites, it is only similarity and not complementarity that strengthens a relationship in the long-term.

Jo, an ambitious and independent wild spirit, finds her home in the calm and gentle nature of Bhaer. Their relationship is grounded in intellectual compatibility and mutual respect. As for Jo and Laurie, both of them have different viewpoints and aspirations. Where Laurie desires to be in a conventional relationship with Jo, she does not want to settle down. She wants to make her own way in the world.

Therefore, the contrast between Jo’s two significant relationships offers a critical lens through which to examine the idea of opposites attracting. Rather than reinforcing the stereotype that differing traits lead to romantic success, Alcott posits that lasting relationships thrive on compatibility and mutual support.



## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The adage "opposites attract" suggests that individuals with contrasting traits can form strong romantic bonds. However, a closer examination of literature reveals that this notion may not always hold true, particularly in long-term relationships. This review analyzes the application of this concept through various studies and applies it to the relationships depicted in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, focusing on Jo March's interactions with Laurie and Friedrich Bhaer.

Research on interpersonal attraction indicates that shared values and similar personality traits often lead to stronger and more satisfying relationships based on experiments by Markus & Kitayama in 1991. According to Byrne's (1971) law of attraction, similarity in attitudes, interests, and beliefs is a key predictor of attraction.

An analysis by Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) found that while initial attraction may arise from differences, successful long-term relationships are marked by partners' shared values. Jo's eventual relationship with Friedrich Bhaer exemplifies this principle. Their mutual respect for literature, intellectual engagement, and shared aspirations create a foundation for a stable partnership.

From a psychological standpoint, the concept of "attachment theory" provides insights into why certain pairings endure while others falter. Individuals with secure attachment styles often seek partners who reflect similar attachment patterns, causing mutual support and understanding (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Although a lot of research has been done when it comes to this topic, there are still areas that need more research. Some notable gaps include a lack of long-term studies.

Research also often neglects the role of emotional intelligence and its impact on compatibility, particularly in differing personality types. Moreover, many studies focus on Western contexts, overlooking how cultural differences influence perceptions of attraction and relationship dynamics. Plus, much of the research is quantitative. There is a lacking in qualitative studies that explore individuals' lived experiences.

In summary, the literature indicates that while the phrase "opposites attract" can capture initial romantic interest, long-term satisfaction in relationships is more strongly correlated with similarity in values, personality traits, and emotional compatibility.

## DISCUSSION

The phrase "opposites attract" has been in use since a very long time now. It was first posited in the 1950s by Robert Francis Winch, a sociologist, who had studied a number of spouses and come to the conclusion that it is not similarity, but rather, complementarity that kept a relationship thriving.

However, the recent past and the contemporary times have seen some changes. Numerous experiments have shown that opposites don't really attract. What we think as attraction is only superficial interest. It is only when two people have a similar sense of ideals and values that mutual and proper attraction and liking occurs. Otherwise, there are high chances of a relationship not working out if the two partners involved have entirely different viewpoints to life.

A recent study conducted at the Institute of Behavioural Genetics (IBG) on 130 couples yielded results that has completely negated the validity of this idea. It was found that almost 82% to 89%

couples were looking for similar traits in prospective partners. They preferred people with whom they could bond over topics like political leaning, religion, current affairs, etc. On the other hand, only 3% couples were interested in partners who had differing views. Other than this, there was no compelling evidence to show that couples with opposite traits ever got together.

This brings us to the topic of Jo March. One of the most famous, evergreen, and well-loved literary heroines who has been an inspiration and influenced many a writers around the world. One of the most important reasons for it is the fact that she has a very captivating personality. We all know that the setting of *Little Women* is a patriarchal one because during those times, women were not given much freedom. In that kind of scenario, we have the March family, specifically Jo, who “wants to make her own way in the world.” She wants to be a famous writer. She knows that “no one will forget Jo March.” She is a wild spirit and she knows how to navigate her way. She also puts in the effort and does what it takes to ensure her dream comes true.

Throughout the work, we see her declaring many times her wish to stay a spinster. She feels that marriage is an “economic proposition” because it is not done out of mutual love but rather, an exchange of something. Women married for money and men married only based on beauty and outwardly appearance. The common notion was that a good-looking wife would make the husband’s character seem more agreeable in society. Due to such reasons, Jo finds the whole idea of marriage to be fake.

When Laurie proposes to Jo, she instantly rejects him. She states that the both of them are too stubborn and hot-headed and that she “loves her liberty too much to give it up.” One might take Jo’s decision to reject Laurie to be unwise and hasty, but we see later that it all ties together perfectly.

When Friedrich Bhaer’s character is introduced to the narrative, we see that he is the perfect intellectual match for her. Though he is older than her, she finds herself drawn to him because they really connect on a deeper level. They share the same interests and have a similar mind. This was not the case with Laurie. He never gave much importance to Jo’s writing. On the other hand, Bhaer was the main influence behind Jo writing her own book at the end of the novel. He brought out the best in her and was always there to encourage her. He was her best critic.

In terms of their personality, they both share the same values and ideals. They both give importance to honesty, kindness, integrity, and intelligence. They have mutual respect for each other and give each other the space they need.

To substantiate from the text, in chapter 34 titled “Friend”, the part where Jo asks Bhaer to give his opinion on her writing, he states it in such a way that it does not hurt her feelings but also challenges her to give her best and come out of her comfort zone. He urges her to write something that will appeal to the public’s hearts. Something that will make them sit and ponder over what she has written. This shows that Bhaer knows Jo’s worth and understands that she can write so much better than her usual sensationalist stories. He is also her moral anchor and reminds her of home.

Unlike Laurie, Bhaer knows that Jo finds real happiness in writing is why he does not stop her from doing so. This is something that Laurie does not understand. He thinks that writing is just another activity that she does. One evidence of this is in part 2, chapter 35 of the novel, “Heartache”, when Laurie proposes to Jo, he says, “You won’t even have to write. Just marry me and we’ll be happy together.” This shows that Laurie did not give as much importance to Jo’s writing as Bhaer did.

This is an important point when it comes to the idea, “opposites attract”. When two people do not share the same likings, they tend to undermine the other’s liking. Because Laurie was never the kind of person who enjoyed reading and writing, he did not value this passion of hers. Since Bhaer was a scholar and someone passionate about literature, his likings aligned with Jo’s.

## **Mental Health**

This also begs for a discussion on mental health. If one is prevented from doing what he or she loves, it greatly affects their mental state. Just like eating and sleeping are necessities needed to keep the body healthy and working, the mind requires things that it enjoys to ensure that one’s mental state is not hampered. Therefore, if someone has a favourite hobby, he or she should be allowed to do it for the sake of their mental health.

In literature, mental health has an interesting position. In contemporary works, it is treated as something normal and nothing to be ashamed of. There is no stigma attached to it. Contemporary society does not shun people who suffer from mental health issues. In fact, they are given adequate and necessary help and support. However, this was not always the case.

The subject of mental health was considered a taboo in the previous centuries. People thought that those who had mental issues were mad. They used derogatory terms and ostracized such people. Special houses were built to keep those people together not for giving treatment, but to separate them from society. Sometimes, people used to think that they were possessed by ghosts. It was merely shrugged off as supernatural occurrences. No one took mental health seriously.

In that scenario, when we study and analyze the literary works of that time period namely, the classics such as *Frankenstein*, *Robin Hood*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, etc. to name a few, very rarely can we see the mention of the topic of mental health. There is not a single classic where one will find discussions of mental health openly. Even if it is there, it will be done in a subtle way.

Now, when we tie this into *Little Women* and try to find instances in the text wherein mental health and mental well-being is shown, we won’t find that many, however, there are underlying events of it in the book.

For example, in the part when Jo is in New York and trying to make a living through her writing, there are periods where she is shown to be frustrated because she cannot get her pen moving. No words are coming out. She isn’t able to write anything because she doesn’t have any ideas in her mind.

Another important instance from the text happens when Beth, Jo’s favourite sister, passes away. For a while, she writes nothing because she gives herself time to let her grief pass. Only when that has passed does she start writing again and meets with success in her writing.

This also highlights that when one’s mind is disturbed, creativity does not come out, and during such times, a companion who helps one to come out of that state is greatly appreciated.

In the case of Jo and Bhaer, help was readily available to Jo when it came to her writing because Bhaer, being an erudite by nature, supported her during her period of writers block. In chapter 46 titled “Under the Umbrella”, when Bhaer finds out and reads one of Jo’s poems, he encourages her to keep writing and publish it. In Jo’s life, Bhaer represents the values she wants to achieve as she grows up. This is very important because Laurie does not embody the ideals that Jo appreciates. He does not admire literature and the arts as much as Bhaer does. Therefore, he wouldn’t have been of help when it would come to Jo’s writing.

Therefore, the whole narrative of Jo's rejection of Laurie and choosing Bhaer over him can be taken as the perfect example to negate the psychological idea of "opposites attract." Laurie and Jo would have never worked out and Louisa May Alcott knew it; which is why she made Bhaer the perfect person for Jo.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has provided a description of the concept of "opposites attract" and how it does not apply in actuality. Substantiating with examples from *Little Women*, specifically the character of Jo March, her pair with Friedrich Bhaer is given more emphasis over her pairing with Laurie because Bhaer and Jo have shared values and similar approaches to life. Both of them give importance to honesty and integrity, and are intellectually aligned. Laurie, on the other hand, would not have been the perfect balance to Jo because both of them are wild and carefree, and do not view life on the same page. Therefore, opposites don't actually attract when it comes to real life. A partner who shares the same values as the other is what keeps a relationship thriving in the long-term.

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# **BREAKING FREE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COPING STRATEGIES IN GILMAN'S *THE YELLOW WALLPAPER* AND DONOGHUE'S *ROOM***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This paper explores how the historical and cultural context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Emma Donoghue's "Room" shape the protagonists' strategies. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century societal norms dictated rigid gender roles, and women were often viewed as fragile and hysterical. The medical community's limited understanding of mental health led to treatment like the 'rest cure' which enforced isolation and stifled women's voices. In this oppressive environment, the unnamed narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" finds her mental state deteriorating under the control of her husband. Who embodies patriarchal authority. Her eventual descent into madness as both a tragic response to her confinement and a form of rebellion against through her secret writings and obsession with the wallpaper.*

*In contrast the 21<sup>st</sup> century context of "Room" reflects greater awareness and discourse surrounding mental health, trauma, and motherhood. While Ma faces the severe psychological effects of being held captive, her approach to overcoming her struggles centres on nurturing her son, Jack. She employs creativity and routine to create a safe and enriching environment within their limited spaces, illustrating rooted in love and resilience. Upon their escape, Ma's journey toward healing incorporates seeking external support from family and professionals, highlighting the evolving societal understanding process. This analysis underscores the divergent strategies employed by each protagonist shaped by their respective historical and cultural frameworks. The narrator's tragic rebellion against her oppression reality contrasts sharply with Ma's nurturing approach and active pursuit of support in a more enlightenment context. Ultimately the examination of these text reveals how societal attitudes towards women mental health and identity have shifted overtime, influencing personal strategies for resilience and recovery. Through this lens, both narrative not only reflect their periods but also engage with ongoing discussion about autonomy, trauma, and the complexities of motherhood, emphasizing the enduring relevance of these contemporary themes.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Isolation, mental health, gender, patriarchy, trauma, motherhood, confinement, resilience, identity, historical context.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The exploration of mental health within literature often serves as a lens through which societal attitudes and cultural norms can be scrutinized. Two significant works that illustrate this phenomenon are Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Emma Donoghue's "Room". These narratives while separated by over a century, provide profound insights into the

psychological struggles of their protagonist shaped distinctly by the historical and cultural contexts of their times.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when “The Yellow Wallpaper” was published women’s roles were predominantly confined to the domestic sphere, and their identities were largely shaped by societal expectation of femininity and submissiveness. Mental health was poorly understood and women often faced dismissal of their concerns, categorized as ‘hysterical’ and subjected to oppressive treatment like the ‘rest cure’ her confinement to a room, prescribed as a remedy for her supposed illness, mirrors the societal constraints placed on women. As she descends into madness, her journey highlights the destructive effects of isolation and the lack of agency, ultimately serving as a critique of the patriarchal structures that govern women’s lives.

In contrast, “Room” presents a contemporary perspective on trauma and motherhood. Set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the novel depicts the harrowing experiences of Ma and her son Jack, who are held captive in a small room for years. This modern context allows for a more nuanced understanding of mental health and recovery. Ma’s strategies for coping with her trauma centre on creating a safe and nurturing environment for Jack, using imagination play and routines to foster his development while also addressing her psychological struggles. Upon their escape, Ma’s path to healing reflects contemporary attitudes towards mental health, emphasizing the importance of seeking support and community involvement.

This paper aims to highlight how the historical and cultural contexts of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries shape the protagonist’s approaches to overcoming their mental health challenges. Where Gilman’s narrator resorts to a tragic rebellion against oppressive forces, Donoghue’s Ma exemplifies resilience and empowerment in the nurturing role. Through this comparative lens, we can gain a deeper understanding of how societal attitudes towards mental health, gender, and identity have evolved, as well as the enduring relevance of these themes in contemporary discussion about trauma and recovery. Ultimately both narratives reveal the complexities of human experiences offering profound insights into the intersection of personal struggles and societal expectations.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The female voice of depression: Linn Kristin Rumar Haug in her 2010 research paper talks about women often stress more often than men because of women’s social roles and status. Those days being a woman it is no wonder that madness seemed like an option. Being reduced to a reproductive organism and a housekeeper might have seemed unbearable for some. If the women dared to oppose the social convention of her time, or showed signs of frustration or anger at her place in home or in life, men had the power to deem her insane. They would lock up or treat in order for her to become content with her lot in life. They were the doctors and love makers, and they decided when a woman was mad.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” and Women’s discourse: Karen Ford in her 2018 research paper states that wallpaper in fact, sometimes appears like male discourse in its capacity to contradict and immobilized the women who are trapped within. It is a narrative of one woman’s mental health down cause specifically by postpartum depression.

Escaping the sentence Diagnosis and discourse in “The Yellow Wallpaper”: Paula A. Treichler in

her 2020 research paper talks about how the narrator is forbidden to involve in normal social convention her physical isolation is in part designed to remove her from the possibility of our stimulating intellectual discussion. It is a male voice that privileges the rational, the practical the observable. It is the voice of male logic and male judgement which dismisses superstition and refuses to see the house as or the narrators' condition as serious. The rules are followed even when the physician - husband is absent.

A new women's journey into insanity; descent and return in 'The Yellow Wallpaper': Woen Rula Quawas in her 2013 research paper talks about women as agents of moral influence, were expected to maintain the domestic sphere as a cheerful, Pure heaven for their husbands. It depicts her arduous struggles against the rules and registrations of male dominated society in Victorian era. She is against the modern medicine that has given to her.

Assertiveness of Ma reflected in Emma Donoghue's Room novel; A feminist approach: Muhammad Nur Andika, in her 2018 research paper shows that the Ma has the assertiveness that enables her to gain the equality to the men. Her assertiveness also enables Ma to change the societal's perspective on the women who have been considered a weak creature and have known the equality of position, role, right and participation to the men especially in the sector of social, politics and economy.

Psychological resilience in Emma Donoghue's Room: Morisol morales ladron in her 2017 paper, explores her interest did not lie in writing about the side effects of such traumatic hardships but quite the contrary on the strong mother -child bond that is established and which secure their final survival and adaptation to society. His purpose of his paper is to analyse the mother – son dyad as the pillar upon which the child's eventual hardiness is erected, thereby converting the novel into a celebration of life rather than a dramatic story of the human struggle and agency of survival.

The effects of mother's ways educate his son in the novel Room written by Emma Donoghue: Richa Dwi Duraini, in her 2020 research paper explores how Ma educates her son . The influence of mother's teachings on Jack's development is very powerful. Jack has gone through several developments in which every development, there are several stages that must be traversed by each child to be categorized as a normal child in quotes growing normally in a generally determined Jack is growing normally.

An Adlerian reading of masculine protest in Donoghue's Room: Mehrnaz Khoshgam in her 2023 research paper, focuses on Adler psychoanalysis. It's a dynamic challenge to know human behaviour needs valuable insight. It also expounds the conflicts experienced by main character Ma. The novel elaborates when she leaves Room and meets new people, she progressively changes her personality. Ma begins to possess difficulty managing her emotions and is definitely enraged by others who treat her as if she is ill. Therefore, the novel explores Ma's internal conflicts.

## **DISCUSSION**

The narrative in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Room" serve as profound explorations of mental health, shaped intricately by their historical and cultural contexts. By examining these texts

together, we can uncover how societal attitudes towards gender, isolation, and motherhood influences the protagonists' strategies for coping with their psychological struggles.

### **Isolation and confinement**

In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the protagonist's confinement reflects the oppressive societal norms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Judith Herman notes "Trauma and Recovery", the struggles for recovery involves reclaiming a sense of self, which the narrator is systematically denied. Isolation is a room stripped of autonomy, her initial compliance with her husband John's prescribed ultimately leads to her mental deterioration. The wallpaper becomes a symbol of her entrapment, as she fixates on its patterns, it represents both her growing madness and her desperate need for self-expression. Her eventual rebellion – tearing down the wallpaper -serves as a climatic assertion of her identity, albeit one that culminates in tragic loss of sanity.

Conversely, in "Room", Ma and Jack's captivity is portrayed through a lens of survived and resilience. Ma's ability to create a nurturing environment with their confined space demonstrates her determination to foster Jack's developed despite their circumstances. Here, isolation is refrained as a protective measure, highlighting the complexities of motherhood in extreme situations. Ma's strategies involve imaginative play and routines transforming the room into a world of possibility for Jack's psychological growth but also provides Ma with a sense of purpose illustrating how confinement can be navigated with agency rather than complete despair.

### **Gender roles and societal expectation**

The historical context surrounding "The Yellow Wallpaper" reveals how rigid gender roles contributes to the protagonist's mental health decline, Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "One is not born but rather becomes, a woman" underscores the societal constructs that dictate women's behaviour and identity. The narrator's identity is largely shaped by the role as a patriarchal authority of her husband. This dynamic is evident in John's dismissive treatment of her concerns, reflecting a broader cultural tendency to marginalize women's voices. As the narrator's mental state deteriorates, her struggle becomes not only a personal battle but also a critique of the oppressive societal norms that restrict women's autonomy.

In "Room", Ma navigates the complexities of motherhood within a contemporary framework that allows for greater agency. While she grapples with her own trauma, her identity as a mother is created to her resilience. This modern context reflects an evolving understanding of women's roles where empowerment and support are emphasized. Ma's determination to create a nurturing space for Jack contrasts sharply with the confinement experienced by the narrator in Gilman's work. Here, motherhood becomes a source of strength and resistance, as Sa Ruddick highlights in her concept of "Maternal thinking" where caring practices can be also serves as acts of defiance.

### **Mental Health and Recovery**



The differing approaches to mental health in the two narratives also highlight evolving societal attitudes. In “The Yellow Wallpaper”, mental illness is poorly understood leading to the tragic fate of the narrator. Michael Foucault’s assertion that “madness is a condition of the mind that is at that same a phenomenon of society” The lack of effective support systems forces the narrator into a spiral of isolation and despair ultimately culminating in her breakdown.

In contrast, “Room”, present a more nuanced perspective on recovery. Ma’s journey past-captivity emphasizes the importance of seeking support and community involvement reflecting contemporary understanding of trauma. Brene Brown’s notion that “owing our story can be hard not nearly as difficult as spending our not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it”, captures Ma’s realization that confronting her past is crucial for healing. This shift towards a more open dialogue about mental health allows Ma to begin the process of reclaiming her identity and agency in a society that is more supportive of individual’s grappling with trauma.

“Room” presents a more contemporary approach to mental health, shaped by 21<sup>st</sup> century understandings of trauma and resilience. Ma’s nurturing environment is vital for Jack’s development; she often tells him, “You have to be brave”, instilling in him a sense of strength despite their dire circumstances. Through storytelling she fosters his imagination explaining, “ In the world, there are no walls”. Which helps Jack grasp the concept of freedom beyond their confinement. After their escape, Ma reflects. “Everything is new”, acknowledging the challenges they face in adapting to the outside world. Her commitment to supporting Jack highlights the modern emphasis on recovery and the importance of emotional resilience in the aftermath of trauma.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper”, the protagonist’s struggles with mental health is profoundly influenced by the oppressive societal norms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, she describes her isolation, stating, “I am alone a great deal of the time” which underscores the confinement imposed by her husband and reflects the broader societal belief that women should be subdued and controlled. Her growing obsession with the wallpaper symbolizes her internal struggle; she writes, “I never saw a worse paper in my life” indicating how the wallpaper becomes a projection of her repressed thoughts and emotions. Ultimately, her descent into madness culminates in a powerful act of defiance, “I’ve got out at last” she has embraced her madness as a way to break free from oppressive situation. This highlights how the strict social norms of her time harm her mental health.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration of mental health gender roles, and societal constraints in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” and Emma Donoghue’s “Room” opens up a rich dialogue about the complexities of human experiences across different historical contexts . But texts, while distinct in their settings and narrative, illuminate how the protagonists navigate their struggles within frameworks that often seek to define and confine them.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper” the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century societal norms contribute significantly to the narrator’s mental decline, reflecting the oppressive structures of patriarchy and the limited understanding of women’s mental health. The story serves as a powerful critique of the medical

practices of that time, exposing the danger of isolation and the silencing of women's voices. The act of tearing down the wallpaper becomes a desperate, albeit tragic, assertion of self-identity, showcasing how societal expectations can be led to profound psychological consequences.

Conversely, "Room" provides a contemporary perspective that embraces the complexity of trauma and resilience. Ma's nurturing approach, in stark contrast to the narrator's confinement, highlights the potential for agency and empowerment in the face of adversity. The modern understanding of mental health allows for a more nuanced portrayal of recovery, emphasizing the importance of community support and the transformation power of maternal love. Ma's journey encapsulates the evolving discourse around trauma, illustrating that recovery is more merely about reclaiming one's identity and navigating the emotional landscape that follows. Together, these narratives compel us to reflect on how literature can serve as a mirror to societal norms and challenges offering insights into the psychological struggles individual face. The incite readers to question how cultural attitudes toward mental health and gender continue to evolve and how these changes affect the lived experiences of individual today.

As we consider the enduring relevance of Gilman's and Donoghue's works, several open-ended questions arise. How do current societal norms continue to shape the experience of those struggle with mental health issues? In what ways can literature contribute to the understanding and destigmatization of mental illness? How do narratives like this uniform our perspective of motherhood, identity, and resilience in contemporary context?

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# **DEMON COPPERHEAD: POOR SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND THEIR INFLUENCES ON OPIOID ADDICTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Barbara Kingsolver's novel, Demon Copperhead places us right in the centre of the opioid crisis which still plagues rural America. Set in Lee County, Virginia, one of the places that was hit the hardest by the crisis, the novel gives us a profound look into the abject poverty and other socioeconomic conditions in the area. Throughout the book the theme of addiction stands out and we can also see other themes like childhood trauma, multi-generational drug abuse, hierarchies in school, poor governance and the failure of the healthcare system woven in. This study aims at finding if Barabara Kingsolver implies that these poor social structures along with others both lead to and exacerbate opioid addiction. This study's findings suggest that they do for the most part with a few exceptions.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Demon Copperhead, Opioid Crisis, Drug Addiction, Poverty, School, Abuse, Social Structures.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social structures are patterns of relationships and stable institutions that enable society to live in harmony. These include family, religion, education and good governance. Social structures influence both individuals at the basic level and society as a whole. This study explores whether the novel *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver implies that poor social structures in rural America both lead to and exacerbate opioid addiction.

### **Demon Copperhead**

*Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver is a bildungsroman about a boy named Damon Fields who lives with his mother in Lee County, Virginia. He is called 'Demon Copperhead' because of his copper coloured hair and attitude. His father is dead and his mother who is a recovering drug addict remarries, but Demon's stepfather is abusive and the stress he creates leads to his mother doing drugs again and ultimately overdosing on them. She then goes to rehab and during this time, the State takes control of Demon's life and it places him in a foster home which is run by Mr. Crickson who is tyrannical and makes Demon and three other children work like slaves in a tobacco field which leads to Demon getting poisoned. The three other children include Tommy, 'Swap-Out' and 'Fast Forward' who has a charismatic personality though he is evil natured. He is a famous high school football player at the time, and he introduces Demon to drugs. Demon's mother dies because of a second overdose and he believes that her life left no mark at all. He then invites himself to a trip to Knoxville where his neighbours, the Peggots' daughter, June lives. The Peggots visit her during Christmas time. Having been there once already when his mother decided

to get remarried, and having met, June's niece, Emmy, Demon strikes up a brief relationship with her during his second visit. Demon is also a very friend of the Peggots' grandson Matt who is called 'Maggot.' Matt also accompanies the Peggots on both occasions to Knoxville. Demon's social worker Miss Barks finds him a new foster home when he returns. She gets him a home with the McCobb family, and Mr. McCobb who turns out to be a conman makes Demon work for a Meth Lab to pay for his stay. After this does not work out, Demon asks his neighbour, Mrs. Peggot who has always been there for him if she will adopt him. But she refuses and tells him that she already has enough on her plate with Maggot whose mother is in prison. Finally, Demon hitchhikes to Murder Valley, Tennessee to find his grandmother and she places him in a home with a football coach and his daughter Angus. Demon's life considerably improves at his new home and though he is at first amazed to be surrounded by wealth, he works hard, makes the most of his new fortune and even strikes up a good friendship with Angus. He eventually becomes a famous high school football player himself, but his career is cut short because of an injury.

Demon is then given oxycontin for his pain and gets addicted to the same drug that made his mother overdose and die. During this time, he meets a girl named Dori who takes care of her dying father, and falls in love with her. She introduces him to more drugs and eventually things go haywire. He moves in with her after her father dies (an event that destroys her emotionally, furthering her addiction). Dori also eventually overdoses and dies. Coach is then framed for embezzlement by his assistant U-Haul and Emmy runs away with Fast Forward and becomes a drug addict herself. Things do take a positive turn towards the end, but the novel gives us sharp insights into the opioid crisis which plagued rural America.

### **The opioid crisis**

From 1999 to 2015 overdose deaths increased by 325% in small counties (Grassley et al.). The opioid crisis in America has led to problems like crime, violence, accidents and homelessness. It is especially prevalent in rural America because health and rehabilitation clinics are few in number and housing and support for recovery is not always present. It is also prevalent in these areas because rural first responders and Emergency Room staff do not have enough experience to deal with cases like drug overdose, and prevention programs and law enforcement are not as active as they are in urban areas. According to the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 1.2 adults from rural communities have misused opioids ("Substance Use and Misuse").

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **A novel that puts you inside the suffering from the opioid crisis**

Richard Smith's 2023 research paper explores how Purdue, the company that help fuel the opioid crisis targeted places like Lee County which were small towns with many working-class people who were disabled because of pain. These were like goldmines to them. We can see this in the character of Kent, June's boyfriend, a drug representative who dresses up and looks like someone who is clearly not from Lee County. He spreads his message like an evangelist and deceives June by pretending to be helping people. June later breaks up with him and when Demon tells her that there is not a single person his age not doing drugs, she tells him that it is not just people his age. It is old, sick people; people who do not get a day's leave from their jobs; laid off people, and

also the woman pulling double shifts at Dollar General with bad knees and ADHD grandkids who she needs to raise by herself doing drugs. This shows us how the opioid crisis has thoroughly permeated rural America. This is relevant to my research because it talks about how poor social structures in rural America like terrible working conditions, lack of family support and poverty exacerbate addiction. It also talks about how people like Kent (who are outsiders) smooth talk their way into persuading medical professionals to sell their products to gullible, poorly informed people in poor socioeconomic areas who take them and fall into addiction.

### **Dopesick: Dealers, doctors and the drug company that addicted America**

Beth Macy's 2018 book *Dopesick* talks about how the opioid crisis did not start in the big cities, but instead started in rural Virginia where treatment options are hours from home. These are places that are not politically important and the crisis really took hold in central Appalachia where unemployed people rip copper wire out of abandoned factories and sell them on the black market to satisfy their addiction. Few businesses set up shop in these regions because almost everybody is addicted to drugs. The opioid crisis first ensnared coal miners, loggers and furniture makers and it was not until decades later researchers realised that the mortality rates in these places had risen. Lee County was one of the chief areas where the crisis struck. It is hard to access by car and politicians did not hold political rallies there or even pretend to care until they were forced too. This is relevant to my research because it talks about how places where treatment options are not readily available can be swept away by a drug crisis. The fact that it took politicians decades to even start caring shows us just how bad the social structures in these places are. They are practically neglected areas that do not exist to anyone except the people who live there. Lee County is the setting for *Demon Copperhead* too. Thus, we can see Barbara Kingsolver borrowing from reality to create fiction that strikes us to the core and gives us an insider view of both the horrible social structures present there and the opioid crisis.

### **A rural community's perspective on the causes of and solutions to the opioid crisis in southern Virginia: a qualitative study**

Angelina J Hargrove et al. in their 2022 research study found that even though strong family ties help individuals not succumb to addiction, multi-generational substance use is one of the root causes of the opioid crisis. The presence of drugs at home likely increases a child's propensity for future substance abuse. They also found that while manual labour jobs help individuals take care of themselves financially, they increase the need for pain management and when local physicians prescribe drugs promoted by pharmaceutical companies, these individuals take them without questioning their doctors and get addicted to them. Finally, they found that unemployment, low self-esteem and lack of mental health services all contribute to addiction. The opioids are also readily available in these areas. This is important to my research as *Demon Copperhead* is also set in Virginia and we can see similar threads in the book like multi-generational substance abuse and the presence of drugs at home leading to future drug addiction. We can also see unemployment and low self-esteem leading to addictive behaviour. In the book, however, strong family ties, do not necessarily help individuals to stay free from addiction. We see both Maggot and Emmy who come from decent families falling into addiction despite having support.

## **County Characteristics and Opioid Mortality Rates in the United States**

Baksun Sung in his 2023 dissertation tells us that a good education, a proper occupation and a decent income are negatively correlated with opioid addiction. Incarceration, food insecurity and poor housing on the other hand are positively correlated with opioid addiction. He explores how social disadvantages not only cause substance abuse deaths at the individual level but also affect things at a macro-level. Low socioeconomic areas where drug diversion takes place are places where there are many substance abuse deaths. A lack of community supervision and the weakening of social norms can also lead to opioid abuse. People in low socioeconomic, poverty-ridden areas are likely to purchase drugs on the black market. This is relevant to my research because we see Demon giving up on his education, moving in with Dori and trying to buy drugs from a pain mill where a doctor prescribes drugs to whoever wants them. Thus, we can see that even in the book social disadvantages affect things at both the individual and macro level. Demon giving up on his education leads to his grandmother cutting him off financially. Hence, he is driven back to poverty. We can also see the fact that there is no proper law enforcement leading to drugs being readily available at pill mills affecting things at a macro-level, leading to countless cases of drug addiction. Dori and Demon using her father's prescription to fuel their addictions is a case of drug diversion. There is not proper community supervision or social work done which leads to this.

## **Pill Mills Are Not Pain Clinics: The Challenge of Addressing One Without Harming the Other**

Robert K. Twillman in his 2012 scholarly article tells us the difference between pill mills and pain clinics and how in the former, patients are given what they ask for after a quick glance at them while in the latter the physician decides what to give the patient after a thorough assessment. There is no documentation done in pill mills and follow-up visits are not scheduled. Controlled substances are just handed out freely while in pain clinics they might not be prescribed at all. Twillman tells us that even though the government has passed stricter laws to try and shut down pill mills, it is not effective because a majority of Americans struggle with chronic pain, and some who are on opioids for them are not addicts but just dependent because they need to survive. According to Twillman very strict laws against pill mills will bankrupt many people and put them in the throes of opioid withdrawal. This is relevant to my research as poverty makes people like Demon and Dori seek out pill mills to both sell to other people waiting in line and to buy drugs for themselves. Dr. Watts runs one such pill mill and he is unscrupulous enough to ask Dori to have sex with him in exchange for a prescription. So, we can clearly see how poor social structures have a positive correlation with drug addiction.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Child abuse**

Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver is a book that places us right in the heart of the opioid crisis in rural America. It talks about abject poverty, hardships and terrible circumstances which crush people. Right off the bat we see drug addiction factoring in because Demon's mother is a recovering drug addict. Demon and his mother live in a trailer home and here we can see poverty coming into play. Demon's mother marries Stoner who is abusive to both Demon and her and

this makes her collapse into addiction again. Here we can see how proper family bonds are essential, especially in rural America where living conditions are harsh to prevent people from falling into addiction. Stoner preventing Demon from playing with Maggot also affects Demon deeply, causing trauma. Stoner does not like the Peggots interfering in any way in Demon's life and since Demon views them as family, it affects him. Childhood trauma can play an important role in predisposing someone to drug addiction (Garami et al.).

### **Poverty and Lack of Educational Opportunities**

Once the Department of Social Services places Demon in Crickson's farm because of his mother's overdose, we see how Social Services have not really checked on the poor living conditions in the farm or they have and have not bothered. Here we can see the government failing to do its job. This again shows us a poor social structure in effect. Crickson also treats the children living with him (except Fast Forward) very badly and makes them work like slaves on his farm instead of attending school. This too causes trauma. Research has both shown that poor income plays a role in misuse of opioids in adolescents and proper education is required to end the prevalence of opioid use (Spencer and Weathers). Demon does drugs at a party Fast Forward throws. Demon believes that there is nothing wrong with it as the children in Crickson's farm have to look out for each other and Fast Forward is simply creating a safe space for the rest of the boys. Here we can clearly see how a life drenched in poverty without proper parental guidance, adult supervision, and education opportunities can lead to children becoming deluded and even justifying substance abuse. Demon is in some sense forced to become an adult when he is just ten-years-old.

### **Religion**

Religion plays a minor role in Demon Copperhead. Demon's mother dies after overdosing a second time and her funeral is held in a church. Demon's mother never liked church and people come to Stoner, hug him, pay their respects and walk away. Demon believes they talk ill of her after paying their respects. Demon feels like he is not seeing faces at the church but hard hearts who think Demon's mother brought this on herself. Regardless of what is in the funeral attendee's hearts, we do not see any of them doing anything for Demon once the service is over. Except the Peggots, everybody goes back to their own lives without a thought for him. Thus, we can see religion which is supposed to bring people together, failing.

Religion which preaches tolerance and kindness fails to have any impact at all on Demon's life. People abandon religion's virtues and norms and do not seek Demon out. This could be because of their hypocrisy or because they also come from terrible circumstances. Hence here we can see that despite their being a good social structure in religion, Demon eventually succumbs to addiction. On the contrary, Demon's lack of a concrete religious upbringing at home might have contributed to his drug addiction later in life. Research shows us that children raised by religious parents who make them attend religious services regularly are less likely to use drugs (Jang et al.).

### **Poor foster care systems**

When Demon lives with the McCobbs, Mr. McCobb insists that he pays for his stay despite him being a child and despite the McCobbs receiving money from the state for fostering Demon. Mr.



McCobb makes Demon work in a dump where he is made to drain acid from batteries. He soon realises that he might be working for a meth lab. Here we can once again see the Department of Social Services not doing its job properly and how it is exploited by men like Mr. McCobb who do not earn any money because of their unwillingness to work, and who are willing to exploit a child for financial gain. Hence both the government and family fail Demon again. Prevalence of drug abuse is also common in both children who are in foster care and adults who come from foster homes (Braciszewski and Stout). This could be a reason why Demon falls into such severe addiction even when things are going well for him later in the story. He does not seek out opioids, but once he starts taking them, he is unable to quit. It could also be why he continues being an addict once he is an adult living with his girlfriend, Dori.

### **Prevalence of drugs, lack of awareness and multi-generational drug abuse**

When Demon breaks his leg later in the story, Dr. Watts prescribes him a painkiller called Lortab which contains an opioid and Coach and him do not question the doctor's judgement. This shows us how pharmaceutical companies destroy people's lives using doctors for profit and how it is easier in rural America because the people there do not have access to good education or are not well informed. Demon goes to school but his entire life is football. He also wants to use a football scholarship to study further. Later, after June's argument with coach about the extent of his injury, he sees an orthopedician who also prescribes him more pain medication. This time it is OxyContin, the very drug that killed his mother. Demon becomes addicted to it and this could be because of multi-generational drug addiction which began with his mother (Hargrove et al.). Research also says that in utero exposure to drugs can have long-lasting effects on brain function (Ross et al.). Demon's mother was addicted to drugs when she was pregnant with him.

I now want to switch to the stories of Demon's friends Maggot and Emmy, and his girlfriend Dori. Maggot's mother is incarcerated but his grandparents are always there for him, but this does not stop him from becoming a full-fledged drug addict. Here we see that even though there is a good social structure (family) in place, Maggot falls off the straight and narrow. Maggot's grandparents are good people who love him but the omnipresence of drugs and peer pressure contribute to his fall. The fact that drugs are everywhere and almost everyone (including school children) are abusing them shows us the lack of proper law enforcement in poverty-stricken rural America. It also shows us the lack of proper awareness programs in schools and non-governmental institutions to prevent children from getting addicted.

### **Failure of schools to be holistic learning centres**

School is also not exactly a nice place to be in in rural America especially if one is poor. Even though rural America is not exactly rich, there are levels to poverty. Demon is mocked by his classmates when he lives with the McCobbs who exploit him and do not even make sure that he has proper clothes to wear. Later when Demon gets popular, it is only because of his association with Coach who is rich. That and his football skills help him. Here we can see that school has hierarchies and cliques and unless you are rich or popular, you are not exactly treated properly. Thus, an institution that should foster growth and help expand minds is destroying lives. On the contrary, it is school which introduces Demon to football and helps him hone his drawing skills under the tutelage of Ms. Annie. Mr. Armstrong who is black and married to Ms. Annie also helps Demon a lot during his time at middle school.

### **Good social structures do not necessarily prevent addiction**

Emmy, Maggot's cousin lives with his aunt, June who ultimately adopts her. Emmy is at first in Knoxville but later moves to Lee County with her aunt. June is a strong woman who loves Emmy and wants the best for her, but Emmy still rebels and takes off with Fast Forward and eventually becomes a drug addict who needs to be rescued from a crack house. Fast Forward forces Emmy to have sex with Mexican drug traffickers to make them do business with him. Emmy is found half-naked in the crack house with bruises on her face. June and Demon rescue her and she is sent to rehab later. Emmy does not have a tough upbringing. She is an orphan, but June adopts her and takes care of her and does as much as she can for her, but Emmy still falls into addiction. Emmy is initially with "Hammerhead Kelly" who is distantly related to her and who really loves her, but she breaks up with him to be with Fast Forward who wrecks her life. Emmy seems to be on the verge of walking into a bright future before disaster strikes. In Emmy's instance it is not poor social structures that lead to her addiction. This goes against my hypothesis that poor social structures lead to drug addiction. Emmy does not come from poverty either because June is someone who has really done well for herself even though she is from Lee County.

### **Failure of the healthcare system**

Finally, we look at Dori Spencer's life. She is Demon's girlfriend who takes care of her ailing father. Here we can see the healthcare system completely failing in doing their job because the doctors who are treating Vester Spencer have been overprescribing him drugs. Dori is able to sell his leftover painkillers and buy opioids for herself. She also uses her father's painkillers to get high with Demon which is a case of drug diversion. Dori being able to sell her father's drugs so easily even though she isn't a hardened criminal or drug dealer shows us how easy it is to buy and sell drugs in rural America where there are hardly any drug addiction awareness programs and community support systems. The law enforcement does not do its duty properly either, but even if they try, they are not going to be able to stop the opioid crisis completely because it has thoroughly permeated rural America. Police officers cannot lock everyone up and completely depriving addicts of their drugs is going to put countless people into withdrawal. This is another crisis the government does not need. Dori and Demon go to a pill mill to buy drugs. As discussed earlier these are illegal clinics where one can pay for any prescription. Dr. Watts, the same person who put Demon on painkillers agrees to give Dori drugs in exchange for sex. She refuses. This is not just completely unprofessional but a crime and the fact that he gets away with it is because it is all happening in rural America. Dr. Watts would not have been so bold in a big city where there are good social structures. Here we can see medical professionals failing the people again by preying on them in every way properly.

### **Toxic relationships and poor rehabilitation facilities**

Demon and Dori love each other deeply but their relationship is toxic. So, family or strong relationships do not exactly help either one of them here. Demon is scared Dori will not be able to survive without his help and Dori is barely functional after her father's death. They are caught in a toxic bubble where they are dependent on each other but are not pushing each other to be better. Dori finally dies of an overdose and Demon takes up June's offer and goes to a rehab in Knoxville. This shows us that rural America does not have proper rehabilitation facilities. Emmy going away to a residential rehab in Asheville is also an example of this. Both characters are

forced to go miles away to regain sobriety. Once again, we see poor social structures exacerbating drug addiction.

## **Community**

I'll end this discussion by focusing on community and how it plays a role in *Demon Copperhead*. Research says that people who have access to healthy environments and good neighbours are less likely to get addicted to opioids while the presence of friends who use drugs is a risk factor (Rottnek and Bello-Kottenstette 127). In the book, *Demon* has both access to healthy environments and good neighbours (the Peggots, his grandmother, Angus, Coach, Tommy, football, June) and also friends who not only do drugs but influence others to do the same (Fast Forward who is a psychopath responsible for many woes in *Demon's* life). Fast Forward also manipulates *Demon* and he fails to see this until it is too late. Thus, we can see that though *Demon* has access to healthy environments and good friends, it is the bad influences that triumph. Hence a healthy community does not necessarily mean that a person will not take to drug addiction later in life. On the contrary, community does help *Demon* get a contract with a paper to draw his cartoon "RedNeck." Ms. Annie and Tommy help him get the job and earn something.

## **CONCLUSION**

The aim of this research paper was to explore whether the novel *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver implies that poor social structures in rural America both lead to and exacerbate opioid addiction. Based on the objective, this study has employed a mixture of close reading, textual and thematic analysis, comparative and intertextual analysis to prove or disprove the hypothesis and have found that the novel does imply that poor social structures in rural America leads to and exacerbates opioid addiction for the most part. There are exceptions where strong community or family bonds do not prevent characters from falling into addiction. Religion also does not help individuals who are hurting as church goers in the book shun the protagonist once his mother dies and do not reach out to him. This happens even though rural America is said to be very Christian or religious. We also see school failing as an institution that fosters learning and helps children grow together in holistic environments. School comes with its cliques, hierarchies, notions of fame and popularity. Having said that, school does not completely fail *Demon* as he meets Ms. Annie and Mr. Armstrong there who become like family, and it introduces him to football. Other than these exceptions, the book which places us right in the heart of the opioid crisis shows us how poverty, child abuse, bad foster care systems, the omnipresence of drugs, multi-generational drug abuse, poor healthcare systems, poor governance, negligent law enforcement, lack of good rehabilitation clinics and social hierarchies all lead to or exacerbate opioid addiction in rural America.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study can be further enhanced by a comprehensive comparative and intertextual analysis with Beth Macy's 2018 book *Dopesick: Dealers, doctors and the drug company that addicted America* (now a TV series). That book also deals with the opioid crisis in Lee County, Virginia and is about real people who lost their lives because of it. Another book that can be taken into consideration is Patrick Radden Keefe's 2021 book *Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty* which deals with the Sackler family and Purdue pharma which was responsible

for research into opioids especially Oxycodone and which persuaded medical professionals to endorse and sell it leading to the opioid crisis. Finally, this study focuses only on the White population of rural America. A comparative analysis or an intertextual analysis with research papers and other books can give us a look into how the Black, Hispanic and Asian communities also struggled because of the opioid crisis.

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# NOVELS OF THE MIND: THE INTERSECTION OF FICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH

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## ABSTRACT

*The term “Mental Health” is much broader and spectacular and according to the recent data one in six people suffer from mental health issues. This paper deals with the introspection of the minds with the fictional representations of mental health issues. Through the lens of novels and short stories the readers often find themselves digging deeper and getting concerned about serious issues like mental health and trauma. This paper further explores the stereotypical mindset rooted in the traditions through the eyes of female writers – Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and how these writers included and normalised mental health issues and raised awareness through their writings. It also looks at fiction's therapeutic potential, putting out the idea that reading stories that depict actual psychological events can help people understand themselves and other people better. Fiction has a vital role in dispelling stigma and advancing mental health because of its ability to humanize and contextualize mental health issues. This paper aims to dive deep into the causes and reasons of the mental health issues faced by the authors mentioned above and how did it affect their writing and the characters in their stories and novels.*

## KEYWORDS

*Mental Health, Fiction, Awareness, Therapeutic, Stereotype*

## INTRODUCTION

The WHO has reported that a significant portion of individuals with mental health conditions remains undiagnosed. Estimates suggest that between 60% to 80% of people with mental health disorders in low- and middle-income countries do not receive adequate treatment. In high-income countries, this figure can vary but remains substantial, with many individuals not seeking or receiving appropriate care. Stereotypes perpetuated by society have long shaped how women's mental health is portrayed and understood. These perspectives affect how women view their psychological health. Some of the female writers like Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman provided important insights on the topic Mental Health and how the concept of “Stereotype” takes over when it comes their mental health and well-being. Sylvia Plath in her short story “The Bell Jar” delves deeper into the themes like depression, constant sadness and self-awareness. Numerous studies show a depiction of despair through Esther Greenwood’s lives – the protagonist of the short story who tries to find her identity in societal constraints and goes through every day’s struggle of securing mental peace and solidarity which she eventually fails. Literature has always been the power house of influencing people in through several means and contexts. Fiction can also raise awareness and challenge the existing stereotypes and the

traditional norms attached to it. This paper aims to look further into the causes and reasons in the next section of review of literature.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The examination of hallucinations and schizophrenia in literature, especially in the works of Virginia Woolf, requires a thorough comprehension of literary devices as well as psychiatric notions. This literature review will explore the meanings, signs, and consequences of schizophrenia and hallucinations, as well as Woolf's modernist writing environment. Perceptual experiences known as hallucinations, which frequently take the form of aural or visual sensations, happen when there are no external stimuli present. The DSM-5 states that hallucinations can profoundly affect a person's sense of reality and can be a symptom of a number of mental health conditions, including schizophrenia. Septimus Warren Smith, a character in the story, has acute auditory hallucinations that are a reflection of his psychological issues and World War I trauma. This depiction is consistent with Psychosis and severe and long-lasting mental illness, schizophrenia is typified by abnormalities in perceptions, intellectual processes, emotional reactivity, and social interactions. Delusions, hallucinations, disordered thought patterns, and decreased functioning are typical symptoms. According to the literature, Woolf's portrayal of Septimus, who struggles with his fractured identity and social estrangement, mirrors the intricacies of schizophrenia. The idea of psychoanalysis, namely Freud's notions of the id, ego, and superego, offers a structure for comprehending the psychological foundations of Septimus's encounters, emphasizing the interaction between his internal struggles and external circumstances.

### **The Mental Health and Life of Virginia Woolf**

Virginia Woolf's personal battles with mental illness had a significant impact on her writing. Throughout her life, Woolf suffered from acute despair and mental breakdowns, which she openly recorded in her journals. The complexity of her characters is informed by her own background, especially in the case of Clarissa Dalloway, who embodies Woolf's existential worries and contemplative disposition. Woolf's novel narrative approaches, including stream of consciousness, are praised in literary criticism for giving readers access to the characters' innermost feelings and ideas and illuminating their psychological states. Many people consider Plath's "The Bell Jar" to be a moving examination of mental health, illustrating the protagonist Esther Greenwood's spiral into sadness. Critics have pointed out that the book is a great source for psychoanalytic interpretation because it closely reflects Plath's actual experiences with mental illness. According to Axelrod (2002), Plath's mental health problems were made worse by the social pressures that women in the 1950s faced, which are reflected in the work. Carson (2017), who highlights that Plath uses writing as a way to process her emotional turmoil and express her difficulties with depression and anxiety, supports this viewpoint. Scholarly discussion about the relationship between creativity and mental illness has lasted for many years. Heilman (2004) suggests that there may be a greater incidence of mental illness among writers and that the emotional complexity of these disorders may improve creative productivity. This idea is consistent with the work of Sylvia Plath, who frequently expresses her psychological issues through vivid imagery and strong emotions. Critics contend that in addition to reflecting her own

experiences, Plath's ability to transform her suffering into art also speaks to more general themes of existential misery and social estrangement. The ethical issues surrounding Plath's depiction of mental illness are also covered in the literature. Because of how intensely personal and frequently terrible her experiences with mental health were, researchers stress the need for sensitivity while talking about her life and work. This ethical aspect, which raises concerns about depiction and the possibility of stigmatization, is essential to comprehending the larger implications of mental illness in literature.

To conduct this research, a thorough assessment of primary and secondary materials will be performed. Plath's literary works, private correspondence, and journals will be used as primary sources; critical evaluations, biographies, and psychological research will be used as secondary sources. Qualitative content analysis will be used as part of the technique to find reoccurring themes about creativity and mental illness. This method will make it possible to comprehend in more detail how Plath's mental health affected both the wider societal background of her work and her artistic expression.

The literature that has already been written highlights the complex connection that Sylvia Plath's writings have always had between mental illness and creativity. This study attempts to add to the existing debate about the nature of artistic inspiration and the significance of mental health in the creative process by evaluating the author's life and works. In the end, it aims to shed light on Plath's longstanding legacy as one of the 20th century's most important writers, whose works have endured and are still cherished by both readers and academics. Literary scholars have investigated the ways in which Plath criticizes the limitations placed on women by society through this metaphor. Elaine Showalter (1985) claims that Plath's portrayal of Esther's mental state is a critique of the constrained roles that women can play and the social forces that uphold these limitations (Showalter, *The Female Malady*). The bell jar represents the collective experience of women who felt smothered by the expectations placed upon them, in addition to Esther's personal struggle.

## DISCUSSION

Some of the crucial points which needs to be included in this research are some of the causes and awareness that why Sylvia Plath, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Virginia Woolf went with themes like self-awareness, depression and addressed mental health issues

1: Personal struggles- Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) is a story that delves deeply into the experiences of mental illness, particularly depression. The primary causes behind the writing of *The Bell Jar* are closely linked to Plath's own life experiences, including her struggles with mental health and the societal expectations placed upon her. The Bell Jar was greatly impacted by Plath's struggle with depression and her encounters with psychiatric therapy. According to Plath's personal letters and notebooks, she went through severe melancholy episodes throughout her life, which were made worse by the demands of her relationships with her family, friends, and professors. The way in which Esther Greenwood's mental health journey is portrayed in the novel is a close reflection of Plath's personal experiences, it provides an honest and raw picture of the struggles that people with depression endure on both an internal and outward level. Hence keeping all these evidences this actually shows that she had a tough time with people around her.

2: Societal Expectations- "I couldn't stand it any longer. I wanted to tell him I was sick of it all, sick of my life, sick of myself, sick of him. But I just sat there and said nothing. He would never understand, I thought. How could he, when I couldn't even explain it to myself?" – These lines are quoted from "The Bell Jar" where the protagonist Esther feels a deep sense of disconnection and frustration within her family and society. The line in the story - "I felt as though I were in a glass jar, or a bell jar, with no way out. Every time I tried to breathe, I felt like I was suffocating. The more I tried to move, the more the walls closed in on me" here the metaphor in the "Bell Jar" is varied and mixed, representing the internal struggles of Plath through her character Esther. The imagery of the "glass jar" or "bell jar" functions as a powerful symbol of confinement. The bell jar, a scientific instrument used to create a vacuum, aptly reflects Esther's sense of being trapped in an oppressive environment with no escape. This imagery underscores the psychological suffocation she feels as she grapples with the expectations and limitations placed upon her by society.

The description of suffocation—"Every time I tried to breathe, I felt like I was suffocating"—highlights the intensity of Esther's distress. Breathing, a fundamental and involuntary action, becomes a struggle, symbolizing her difficulty in navigating her life within the constraints imposed on her. The metaphor extends to represent the broader societal pressures that stifle her individuality and autonomy, creating a suffocating atmosphere that impedes her personal growth and self-expression.

3: Breaking Stereotypes: Another important aspect of Virginia Woolf's work is her efforts to dispel myths about mental health. During a period when mental illness was frequently misinterpreted and stigmatized, Woolf's writing provided a radical break from the dominant narratives. Woolf portrays mental illness as a fundamentally human experience affected by a myriad of elements, including trauma, cultural pressures, and the limitations of modern medical expertise, rather than as a sign of weakness or moral failing. Woolf delicately touches on the subject of reality's fluidity and mental perception in her short story *The Mark on the Wall*. A little mark on the wall prompts the narrator to reflect about existence, memory, and the meaning of reality. The story's stream-of-consciousness style forces the reader to confront the subjectivity of mental experience by reflecting the narrator's fluctuating mental state. Woolf expresses her desire for quiet, peaceful, spacious thought that is uninterrupted, free from having to get up from her chair, and characterized by letting a page rise from a pile of papers, then reaching out a hand to pick it up and examine it. (Always the Wall Mark). This section emphasizes the narrator's wish for mental peace and how difficult it is to find it in a world full of outside distractions. Woolf's narrative approach in *The Mark on the Wall* is a prime example of her ability to defy accepted storytelling conventions and dispel myths about mental health and sickness. Woolf challenges the conventional idea of a cohesive, logical mind by providing the reader with a fractured and introspective story, implying that mental experience is fundamentally complicated and multidimensional. Woolf has always normalised "Mental health" issues and she saw it as an opportunity for creative writing. Her writings reflect her personal experiences and also serve as an encouragement to other authors to write honestly and compassionately about mental illness. This paper also aims to point out that literary critics such as Hermione Lee and Elaine Showalter have explored Woolf's intricate portrayal of mental illness, emphasizing her nuanced depiction of psychological depth and the societal factors that contribute to mental distress. Lee, in her



biography *Virginia Woolf* (1997), examines how Woolf's own experiences with mental illness informed her characters, particularly highlighting how Woolf's use of stream-of-consciousness narration allowed for a profound exploration of the inner lives of individuals struggling with mental health. In "Professions of women" the character which is known as "The angel in the house" is often considered to be a sympathetic woman and she is expected to be perfect and utterly unselfish. She is portrayed as a lady who "never had a mind or a wish of her own" and who has always put other people's needs and wants ahead of her own. The expectations that society places on women to be submissive, caring, and humble are personified by this figure. According to Woolf, women must transcend this internalized ideal as a psychological obstacle in order to become free in both their personal and professional lives. The "Angel in the House" is a potent representation of the restrictive gender standards that prevented women from achieving their full potential and inhibiting their inventiveness. The mental struggle many women experienced between achieving their own intellectual and creative goals and living up to society expectations is highlighted by Woolf's portrayal of this heroine. Woolf's claim that the "Angel" needs to be "killed" emphasizes how important it is for women to stand up for themselves and to be educated to acquire a profession.

5: Using Literature to Influence Public Perceptions and Policy: For a long time, the way that mental health is portrayed in literature has been a potent weapon for influencing public opinion and establishing mental health policy. Authors create dialogues that have the potential to significantly alter society by bringing mental health issues—often taboo—into the public eye through their literary works. Considering literature's importance in increasing awareness, promoting better mental health care, and lessening the stigma attached to mental illness, it is especially clear how powerful literature is in influencing public opinion and policy. Using the opinions of literary critics and academics, this section explores how historically, representations of mental health in literature have impacted public conversation and policy issues.

## CONCLUSION

The examination of mental health and sickness in fiction highlights the complex interaction between social forces and personal experiences. The chosen short stories show the importance of support networks in promoting resilience and recovery in addition to offering a glimpse into the challenges faced by persons dealing with mental health concerns. Literature is still a potent tool for fostering understanding, creating awareness, and fostering conversation about mental health even as it changes. Readers can develop empathy and help create a more compassionate society that understands the value of mental health by actively participating with these narratives. Writers such as Woolf, Gilman and Plath they question the stigma associated with mental illness and emphasize the value of compassion, encouragement, and candid communication in promoting mental health. Literature is still a crucial instrument for raising knowledge, understanding, and eventually compassion as society struggles with the complexity of mental health. Readers who engage with these experiences are urged to think on their own perceptions of mental health and contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals suffering from mental illness. Redfield Jamison, a clinical psychologist and professor of psychiatry, examines the link between manic-depressive illness and creativity in *Touched with Fire*. She discusses how mental illness has influenced the lives and works of various artists, poets, and writers, arguing that the heightened emotional states associated with bipolar disorder have

often contributed to creative achievements. Jamison's work is particularly notable for its combination of literary analysis and psychiatric research. The psychological and emotional foundations of Virginia Woolf's writing are examined in Mitchell A. Leaska's *Granite and Rainbow*. Leaska speaks about how Woolf's own experiences with mental illness shaped her creative subjects, especially when it came to examining the lines separating sane from crazy. His research sheds light on the manner in which Woolf challenged social conventions and addressed the intricacies of mental health in her writing.

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# **THE PRICE OF ANARCHY: MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIETAL IMPACT OF *FIGHT CLUB***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*"Fight Club," directed by David Fincher, is a provocative exploration of mental illness. Through a unique narrative and complex characters, the film examines societal pressures, consumerism, and the detrimental effects of unchecked mental health issues. This paper analyses the film's portrayal of mental health conditions, considering its impact on viewers and broader societal discussions.*

*Examining the film's characters, narrative, and symbolism, we explore how Fight Club has ignited conversations about mental health awareness, societal attitudes towards those struggling with mental illness, and the importance of seeking support. The film's portrayal of dissociative identity disorder, in particular, has been a subject of critical debate, with some arguing for its accuracy and sensitivity, while others contend that it perpetuates harmful stereotypes.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Mental health, societal pressures, consumerism, dissociative identity disorder, stigma, harmful stereotypes*

## **INTRODUCTION**

David Fincher's 1999 film *Fight Club* is a provocative and enigmatic exploration of mental health, identity, and societal pressures. The film's unnamed protagonist grapples with insomnia, disillusionment, and a sense of meaninglessness in his life. His creation of the underground Fight Club becomes a catalyst for exploring these themes and raises questions about the nature of mental illness.

This analysis will delve into the film's portrayal of mental health, examining the unreliable narrator's perspective, the enigmatic character of Tyler Durden, and the blurred lines between sanity and insanity. By exploring these elements, we can gain a deeper understanding of the psychological complexities presented in "*Fight Club*."

*Fight Club* has sparked significant debate and discussion about mental health issues. Its exploration of themes such as identity, consumerism, and the search for meaning has resonated with audiences, prompting conversations about the psychological challenges faced by individuals in modern society. The film's portrayal of mental health, while controversial, has contributed to a broader public discourse on the topic.

One of the key elements of *Fight Club* is the unreliable narrator, who is revealed to be the protagonist's alter ego, Tyler Durden. This unreliable perspective challenges viewers to question the validity of the narrative and the nature of reality. From a psychological standpoint, the

narrator's fragmented identity and dissociative experiences can be seen as symptoms of a mental health condition, such as dissociative identity disorder or schizophrenia.

Tyler Durden, the charismatic leader of Fight Club, is a complex and ambiguous character. His manipulative and potentially dangerous behaviour raise questions about his own mental state. Some interpretations suggest that Tyler Durden is a manifestation of the narrator's repressed anger and desire for rebellion. Others argue that he is a separate entity, possibly a product of the narrator's dissociative identity disorder.

Fight Club blurs the lines between sanity and insanity, challenging viewers to question the nature of reality and the boundaries of the human mind. The narrator's experiences and the enigmatic character of Tyler Durden raise important questions about the subjective nature of mental health and the difficulty of distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy psychological states.

The film remains relevant today due to its exploration of themes that continue to resonate with audiences. The film's critique of consumerism, its examination of societal pressures, and its exploration of mental health issues are still highly relevant in today's world.

## **Review of Movie**

Fight Club, David Fincher's 1999 psychological thriller, is a cinematic masterpiece that delves into the psyche of a disillusioned narrator, exploring themes of consumerism, masculinity, and the search for meaning in a chaotic world. Based on Chuck Palahniuk's controversial novel, the film is a provocative and thought-provoking exploration of the human condition.

The film follows an unnamed narrator, struggling with insomnia, who encounters Tyler Durden, a charismatic and enigmatic soap salesman. Together, they establish an underground fight club, a secret society where men can release their primal urges and find a sense of purpose. As the fight club grows in popularity, so too does Tyler's influence over the narrator, leading to a dangerous and unpredictable descent into chaos.

The film critiques the superficiality of modern consumer culture. The narrator's life is defined by his possessions and his desire for status, which ultimately leaves him feeling empty and unfulfilled. Tyler Durden, in contrast, rejects materialism and encourages a more primal, anarchic lifestyle.

Fight Club explores traditional notions of masculinity and the toxic effects of toxic masculinity. The fight club becomes a space for men to assert their dominance and prove their worth, but it also leads to violence and destruction. Tyler Durden's charismatic persona and rebellious attitude embody a toxic form of masculinity that ultimately leads to chaos.

The narrator's insomnia is a recurring motif throughout the film, symbolizing his inability to find peace and meaning in his life. His mental state deteriorates as he becomes more involved with Tyler and the fight club, highlighting the dangers of unchecked anger and frustration.

The film's climax is a chaotic and violent sequence that reflects the destructive nature of Tyler's philosophy. The fight club's descent into anarchy and chaos is a powerful indictment of the dangers of unchecked individualism and the pursuit of meaning at any cost.

## Character Description

Tyler Durden, the enigmatic and rebellious alter ego of the unnamed narrator in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, is a character that has captivated readers and critics alike. His complex nature, mixed with his provocative philosophy, makes him a fascinating and debatable figure.

At the heart of Tyler's character is his rejection of mainstream society and consumerism. He views contemporary civilization as a corrupt and oppressive system that stifles individuality and creativity. His philosophy is rooted in anarchy, nihilism, and a desire to destroy the very foundations of this system. Tyler's rebellious nature is evident in his actions, from forming the Fight Club to advocating for the destruction of skyscrapers.

Tyler also serves as a catalyst for the narrator's personal and psychological transformation. The narrator, trapped in a boring and unfulfilling lifestyle, finds in Tyler a sense of purpose, excitement, and rebellion. Tyler's influence leads the narrator to question his own identity, values, and place in the world.

However, Tyler is not merely a rebellious icon. He can also be seen as a manifestation of the narrator's shadow self, the repressed elements of his personality that he is unable to acknowledge or accept. His rebellious nature, his preference for violence, and his nihilistic worldview represent the darker side of the narrator's psyche.

Tyler's character is deeply intertwined with notions of masculinity. He rejects the traditional, patriarchal version of masculinity and instead embraces a more primal, violent form of manhood. Tyler's appeal to the other men in Fight Club can be attributed to his ability to tap into their own repressed desires and anxieties about masculinity.

Furthermore, Tyler's existence is a constant source of ambiguity throughout the novel. Is he a real person, or is he a product of the narrator's imagination? This question is central to the novel's exploration of identity, reality, and the power of the mind.

Tyler Durden's character is a complex and contradictory figure. On one hand, he is a charismatic and rebellious leader who inspires others to question societal norms and embrace their own individuality. On the other hand, he is a dangerous and destructive force who promotes violence and anarchy. Tyler's appeal lies in his ability to embody both sides of the human psyche and to challenge our preconceived notions about masculinity, identity, and the nature of reality.

The relationship between the narrator and Tyler Durden is a complex and ambiguous one. The narrator is both attracted to and repelled by Tyler's rebellious spirit. He admires Tyler's courage and his willingness to challenge societal norms, but he also fears Tyler's destructive tendencies. The narrator's struggle to reconcile his own desires and anxieties with Tyler's philosophy is a central theme of the novel.

Tyler Durden's character can be seen as a reflection of the anxieties and contradictions of the modern individual. In a world that is increasingly defined by consumerism, conformity, and the pursuit of material success, Tyler Durden offers a seductive alternative. He represents a desire for freedom, authenticity, and a sense of purpose. However, Tyler's philosophy is ultimately destructive and nihilistic. It offers no real solutions to the problems of modern society and ultimately leads to violence and self-destruction.

In conclusion, Tyler is a multifaceted and enigmatic character who embodies the rebellious spirit of the 1990s and the psychological complexities of the modern individual. His character serves

as a commentary on consumerism, masculinity, and the human psyche, making him one of the most memorable and controversial figures in contemporary literature. Tyler's appeal lies in his ability to challenge societal norms, provoke thought, and explore the darker aspects of the human condition.

## **PORTRAYAL OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE FILM *FIGHT CLUB***

### **The Unreliable Narrator: A Psychological Analysis of Fight Club**

David Fincher's *Fight Club* is a provocative and enigmatic film that has sparked numerous interpretations and debates. While the film does not explicitly diagnose any of its characters with mental illness, it raises intriguing questions about the nature of mental health and the blurred lines between sanity and insanity. The narrator's experiences and the enigmatic character of Tyler Durden offer a complex exploration of psychological states that can be interpreted through a variety of lenses.

#### **The Unreliable Narrator**

The film's narrative is presented through the eyes of an unnamed narrator, who is revealed to be the protagonist's alter ego, Tyler Durden. This unreliable perspective challenges viewers to question the validity of the narrative and the nature of reality. From a psychological standpoint, the narrator's fragmented identity and dissociative experiences can be seen as symptoms of a mental health condition, such as dissociative identity disorder or schizophrenia.

**Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID):** The narrator's ability to switch between distinct personalities, including his own and Tyler Durden's, is a hallmark of DID. This disorder involves the presence of multiple distinct identities or personalities within a single individual. The narrator's experiences of amnesia and confusion about his own identity further support the possibility of DID.

**Schizophrenia:** The narrator's delusions, hallucinations, and paranoid thoughts could also be indicative of schizophrenia. His belief in the existence of Tyler Durden, despite the lack of evidence, and his paranoia about the consumerist society are consistent with the symptoms of this disorder.

#### **The Enigmatic Character of Tyler Durden**

Tyler Durden, the charismatic leader of Fight Club, is a complex and ambiguous character. His manipulative and potentially dangerous behaviour raises questions about his own mental state. Some interpretations suggest that Tyler Durden is a manifestation of the narrator's repressed anger and desire for rebellion. Others argue that he is a separate entity, possibly a product of the narrator's dissociative identity disorder.

**Projection of Unconscious Desires:** Tyler Durden could represent the narrator's repressed anger, frustration, and desire for freedom from societal constraints. By projecting these qualities onto another character, the narrator can distance himself from his own negative emotions.

**A Separate Identity:** Alternatively, Tyler Durden could be a separate identity within the narrator's mind. This interpretation aligns with the possibility of dissociative identity disorder, where multiple distinct personalities coexist within a single individual.

## **The Blurred Lines Between Sanity and Insanity**

Fight Club blurs the lines between sanity and insanity, challenging viewers to question the nature of reality and the boundaries of the human mind. The narrator's experiences and the enigmatic character of Tyler Durden raise important questions about the subjective nature of mental health and the difficulty of distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy psychological states.

**The Subjectivity of Mental Health:** The film highlights the subjective nature of mental health experiences. What one person perceives as normal or abnormal may be different from another person's perspective. This challenges the traditional medical model of mental illness, which often focuses on objective criteria for diagnosis and treatment.

**The Role of Society and Culture:** The film also suggests that societal and cultural factors can influence the development and expression of mental health conditions. The narrator's disillusionment with consumerism and his desire to rebel against societal norms may contribute to his psychological struggles.

Fight Club offers a complex and ambiguous exploration of mental health, challenging viewers to question the nature of reality and the boundaries of the human mind. The narrator's experiences and the enigmatic character of Tyler Durden raise intriguing questions about dissociative identity disorder, schizophrenia, and the subjective nature of mental health. While the film does not provide definitive answers, it offers a thought-provoking exploration of psychological states that can be interpreted through a variety of lenses.

## **The Influence of Consumer Culture**

The film critiques the consumerist society, suggesting that it can lead to feelings of emptiness, dissatisfaction, and alienation. The narrator's obsession with material possessions and his desire for a more meaningful life can be seen as contributing factors to his mental health struggles.

**The Illusion of Happiness:** The film suggests that the pursuit of material wealth and status can create a false sense of happiness and fulfilment. The narrator's disillusionment with consumerism may be a reflection of his underlying psychological distress.

## **The Role of Masculinity**

**Toxic Masculinity:** The film explores themes of toxic masculinity, particularly in the character of Tyler Durden. Durden's aggressive and violent behaviour can be seen as a manifestation of traditional masculine ideals that often prioritize strength, dominance, and suppression of emotions.

**The Pressure to Conform:** The narrator's struggle to conform to societal expectations of masculinity can also contribute to his psychological distress. The film suggests that the pressure to be a "real man" can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms and mental health issues.

## **The Dangers of Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms**

**Violence and Aggression:** The film's exploration of violence and aggression can be seen as a warning about the dangers of unhealthy coping mechanisms. The narrator's involvement in Fight Club and his increasingly violent behaviour can be interpreted as a way to cope with underlying psychological issues.

**The Importance of Healthy Coping Strategies:** The film highlights the importance of finding healthy ways to cope with stress and emotional distress. The narrator's failure to develop healthy coping mechanisms ultimately leads to negative consequences.

Beyond these core themes, *Fight Club* also offers valuable insights into other aspects of mental health:

**The Impact of Societal Pressures:** The film's critique of consumerism and the emptiness of modern life highlights the psychological impact of societal pressures. The narrator's struggles can be seen as a reflection of the broader societal pressures that many individuals face today.

**The Importance of Self-Care:** The film emphasizes the importance of self-care and the dangers of neglecting one's own needs. The narrator's neglect of his own health and well-being ultimately leads to his descent into madness.

**The Power of Human Connection:** The film highlights the importance of human connection and the psychological benefits of social support. The formation of *Fight Club*, despite its violent nature, can be seen as a search for meaning and a sense of community.

In addition to exploring these themes, *Fight Club* also offers a provocative and challenging portrayal of mental illness. The film's ambiguous and complex characters can help viewers to recognize the complexity of mental health issues and avoid reducing individuals to simplistic labels. By breaking down stigma and promoting empathy, *Fight Club* can contribute to a more inclusive and accepting society.

### **Additional Considerations**

**The Role of Cultural Context:** The film's cultural context can influence how viewers interpret its portrayal of mental illness. Cultural norms and beliefs about mental health can shape perceptions and attitudes. For example, in some cultures, mental illness may be stigmatized and viewed as a sign of weakness, while in others, it may be seen as a natural part of life.

**The Impact of Media Literacy:** Educating viewers about media literacy can help them critically analyse the film's portrayal of mental illness and challenge harmful stereotypes. By understanding the techniques used by filmmakers and media producers, viewers can become more discerning consumers of media and less susceptible to the influence of negative stereotypes.

**The Importance of Diverse Representation:** The media should strive to include diverse portrayals of mental illness, representing individuals from different backgrounds and experiences. By seeing individuals with mental illness represented in a variety of ways, viewers can develop a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of mental health.

By considering these additional factors, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the accuracy of mental illness portrayal in *Fight Club* and its potential impact on viewers

## **ACCURACY ON PORTRAYAL OF MENTAL ILLNESS**

*Fight Club* offers a provocative exploration of mental health, but its portrayal of mental illness has been a subject of debate. While the film presents nuanced characters and complex themes, it also has the potential to perpetuate stereotypes and misconceptions that can have harmful consequences.



One of the primary concerns with *Fight Club* is its portrayal of violence and aggression as associated with mental illness. The film's characters engage in violent and destructive behaviours, which can reinforce the harmful stereotype that individuals with mental illness are inherently violent or dangerous. This stereotype is inaccurate and can lead to discrimination, prejudice, and social exclusion.

The film's focus on male characters and their experiences may also contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes about mental health. While the film offers insights into the psychological struggles of men, it may not resonate with viewers who identify with different genders or sexual orientations. This can lead to a narrow and incomplete understanding of mental health issues.

The portrayal of mental illness in *Fight Club* can be misleading and contribute to the spread of misinformation. The film's portrayal of the narrator's experiences and the enigmatic character of Tyler Durden may not accurately reflect the reality of mental health conditions. This can lead to confusion, misunderstandings, and a distorted view of mental illness.

Moreover, the film's focus on extreme behaviours and dramatic outcomes can create a false sense of normality for viewers. It may lead individuals to believe that mental illness is always accompanied by dramatic symptoms or violent behaviour, which can discourage them from seeking help or acknowledging their own struggles.

Accurate and empathetic portrayals of mental illness in media are essential for challenging stereotypes, promoting understanding, and reducing stigma. By accurately representing the experiences of individuals with mental illness, media can help to create a more inclusive and supportive society.

It is important to note that while *Fight Club* may have limitations in its portrayal of mental illness, it can still be a valuable tool for discussion and education. By critically analysing the film and providing viewers with accurate information about mental health, we can use it as an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and promote understanding.

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the accuracy of mental illness portrayal in "*Fight Club*," it is essential to consider the following factors:

**The Complexity of Mental Illness:** Mental illness is a complex issue with a wide range of symptoms and presentations. The film's focus on extreme behaviours and dramatic outcomes can create a distorted view of mental health conditions. For example, the film portrays the narrator's experiences as involving extreme violence and aggression, which may not be representative of all individuals with mental illness.

**The Role of Context:** The film's portrayal of mental illness should be considered within the context of its narrative and themes. The film's exploration of consumerism, identity, and the search for meaning can influence the way viewers perceive the characters' psychological struggles. For instance, the film's critique of consumerism and the emptiness of modern life may resonate with viewers who are struggling with similar issues, making them more receptive to the film's message about mental health.

**The Impact on Viewers:** The film's portrayal of mental illness can have a significant impact on viewers' attitudes and behaviours. It is important to consider how the film's messages are interpreted and internalized by audiences. For instance, some viewers may find the film's

portrayal of mental illness to be disturbing or harmful, while others may find it to be empowering and inspiring.

### **Additional Considerations**

**The Role of Cultural Context:** The film's cultural context can influence how viewers interpret its portrayal of mental illness. Cultural norms and beliefs about mental health can shape perceptions and attitudes. For example, in some cultures, mental illness may be stigmatized and viewed as a sign of weakness, while in others, it may be seen as a natural part of life.

**The Impact of Media Literacy:** Educating viewers about media literacy can help them critically analyse the film's portrayal of mental illness and challenge harmful stereotypes. By understanding the techniques used by filmmakers to create certain effects and convey certain messages, viewers can become more discerning consumers of media and less susceptible to the influence of harmful stereotypes.

**The Importance of Diverse Representation:** Media should strive to include diverse portrayals of mental illness, representing individuals from different backgrounds and experiences. By seeing individuals with mental illness represented in a variety of ways, viewers can develop a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of mental health.

By considering these additional factors, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of the accuracy of mental illness portrayal in *Fight Club* and its potential impact on viewers.

## **IMPACT ON MEDIA PORTRAYALS ON THE VIEWERS**

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and influencing individual attitudes and behaviours. Through television, film, literature, and other forms of media, viewers are exposed to a wide range of characters and narratives that can significantly impact their understanding, beliefs, and subsequent actions. This essay will explore the ways in which media representations can influence viewers' attitudes and behaviours towards mental health, examining both positive and negative effects.

### **The Power of Media Portrayal**

The media has the power to create and reinforce stereotypes, challenge preconceived notions, and promote empathy and understanding. When it comes to mental health, media portrayals can significantly influence how viewers perceive individuals with mental illness, leading to either positive or negative consequences.

### **Negative Impacts of Media Portrayals**

One of the most concerning negative impacts of media portrayals is the perpetuation of stereotypes and stigma surrounding mental illness. Negative stereotypes often depict individuals with mental illness as violent, unpredictable, or incapable of functioning in society. These stereotypes can lead to discrimination, prejudice, and social exclusion, making it difficult for individuals with mental illness to navigate their daily lives.

Additionally, media portrayals can contribute to the stigmatization of mental illness by portraying it as a shameful or embarrassing condition. This can discourage individuals from seeking help or disclosing their mental health struggles, leading to a cycle of isolation and suffering. Moreover,

the media may sensationalize or trivialize mental illness, which can further distort public perception and contribute to negative stereotypes.

## **THE CASE OF FIGHT CLUB**

The film *Fight Club* offers a complex and ambiguous portrayal of mental health, raising questions about identity, societal expectations, and the search for meaning. While the film has resonated with many viewers, its portrayal of mental illness is not without flaws.

**The Normalization of Unhealthy Behaviours:** The film's portrayal of violence and aggression as a means of coping with psychological distress can inadvertently normalize these behaviours. This can lead to viewers justifying or even romanticizing unhealthy coping mechanisms.

**The Glamorization of Mental Illness:** The film's exploration of the narrator's fragmented identity and dissociative experiences can be seen as a form of glamorization. This can create a distorted view of mental health struggles, minimizing their severity and making them seem desirable.

**The Perpetuation of Stereotypes:** The film's focus on male characters and their experiences may contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes related to mental health. Additionally, the portrayal of individuals with mental illness as troubled or dangerous can reinforce harmful stereotypes.

## **Positive Impacts of Media Portrayals**

While media portrayals can have negative consequences, they also have the potential to promote positive change and challenge stigma. When individuals with mental illness are portrayed in a realistic and empathetic manner, viewers can develop a greater understanding of their experiences and challenges. This can help to break down stereotypes and foster empathy and compassion towards individuals with mental illness.

Furthermore, the media can play a crucial role in raising awareness about mental health issues and promoting help-seeking behaviour. By highlighting the importance of early intervention and treatment, the media can encourage individuals to seek professional help and reduce the stigma associated with doing so. Additionally, positive media portrayals can empower individuals with mental illness to share their stories and advocate for their rights, challenging negative stereotypes and promoting social change.

## **Factors Influencing the Impact of Media Portrayals**

Several factors can influence the impact of media portrayals on viewers, including the type of media, the specific portrayal, and the viewer's own experiences and beliefs. For example, television and film, which often reach a wide audience, can have a significant impact on public perception. However, the specific portrayal of mental illness within these media forms can vary widely, from negative stereotypes to positive and empowering representations.

Additionally, viewers' own experiences and beliefs can shape how they interpret and respond to media portrayals. Individuals who have personal experience with mental illness may be more likely to identify with characters and narratives that accurately reflect their own experiences. Conversely, individuals with limited exposure to mental illness may be more susceptible to negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media.

## **THE ROLE OF MEDIA LITERACY**

Media literacy plays a crucial role in helping viewers critically analyse media portrayals and challenge harmful stereotypes. By understanding the techniques used by filmmakers and media producers, viewers can become more discerning consumers of media and less susceptible to the influence of negative stereotypes.

### **The Importance of Diverse Representation**

The media should strive to include diverse portrayals of mental illness, representing individuals from different backgrounds and experiences. By seeing individuals with mental illness represented in a variety of ways, viewers can develop a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of mental health.

### **The Power of Storytelling**

Media has the power to tell compelling stories that can resonate with viewers on a deep emotional level. By telling authentic and relatable stories about individuals with mental illness, the media can help to break down stigma and promote understanding.

### **The Role of Advocacy**

Individuals with mental illness and their advocates can play a crucial role in shaping media portrayals. By speaking out against negative stereotypes and advocating for positive representation, they can help to create a more inclusive and supportive media landscape.

The media plays a powerful role in shaping public perception and influencing attitudes towards mental health. While media portrayals can have negative consequences, such as perpetuating stereotypes and stigma, they also have the potential to promote positive change and challenge negative perceptions. By increasing awareness, promoting empathy, and challenging stigma, the media can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive society for individuals with mental illness.

It is important to critically evaluate media portrayals of mental illness and to seek out diverse and accurate representations. Additionally, individuals with mental illness can play a crucial role in shaping media narratives by sharing their stories and advocating for positive representation. By working together, we can harness the power of the media to promote mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and create a more compassionate and inclusive society for all.

## **FIGHT CLUB: A CATALYST FOR MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**

David Fincher's *Fight Club* is a provocative and enigmatic film that has sparked numerous interpretations and debates. While its portrayal of mental health has been a subject of criticism, the film can also serve as a value *Fight Club: A Catalyst for Mental Health Awareness*

David Fincher's *Fight Club* is a provocative and enigmatic film that has sparked numerous interpretations and debates. While its portrayal of mental health has been a subject of criticism, the film can also serve as a valuable tool for discussion and education about mental health issues. By critically analysing the film and providing viewers with additional resources, we can harness its potential to promote understanding, empathy, and a more inclusive society for individuals with mental illness.

## **The Power of Discussion**

Fight Club can be used as a catalyst for open and honest discussions about mental health. The film's complex and ambiguous portrayal of mental illness can encourage viewers to explore their own thoughts and feelings about the topic. By engaging in thoughtful discussions, individuals can challenge their own biases and stereotypes, and develop a greater understanding of the experiences of others.

## **Challenging Stereotypes**

The film's portrayal of mental illness can challenge harmful stereotypes and misconceptions. By examining the characters' struggles and behaviours, viewers can recognize the complexity of mental health issues and avoid reducing individuals to simplistic labels. This can help to break down stigma and promote a more inclusive and accepting society.

## **Promoting Empathy and Understanding**

Fight Club can also foster empathy and understanding towards individuals with mental illness. By exploring the characters' experiences from a psychological perspective, viewers can gain a deeper appreciation for the challenges they face. This can encourage viewers to be more compassionate and supportive towards individuals with mental health conditions.

## **The Importance of Critical Analysis**

While Fight Club can be a valuable tool for discussion and education, it is crucial to approach the film critically. The film's portrayal of mental illness is not without flaws, and it can perpetuate harmful stereotypes if not viewed in context. It is important to provide viewers with additional resources and information about mental health to ensure a balanced and accurate understanding.

## **A Deeper Dive into the Film's Themes**

To gain a more in-depth understanding of Fight Club as a catalyst for mental health awareness, it is essential to explore the film's key themes and their relevance to mental health issues:

**Identity and Self-Discovery:** The film's exploration of identity and the search for meaning can resonate deeply with individuals struggling with mental health issues. The narrator's fragmented identity and his relentless pursuit of purpose can be seen as reflections of the challenges faced by many individuals with mental illness. They may identify with the narrator's struggle to find their place in the world and their desire to escape the mundane routines of everyday life.

**Consumerism and Materialism:** The film's critique of consumerism and the emptiness of modern life can be interpreted as a reflection of the psychological impact of societal pressures. The narrator's disillusionment with consumerism can be seen as a manifestation of underlying mental health struggles. The film suggests that the pursuit of material possessions and social status can lead to feelings of emptiness, dissatisfaction, and even despair.

**The Dangers of Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms:** The film's exploration of violence and aggression as coping mechanisms can be seen as a warning about the potential consequences of unhealthy behaviours. The narrator's involvement in Fight Club can be interpreted as a way to cope with underlying psychological issues. The film highlights the importance of finding healthy and constructive ways to manage stress and emotional distress.

**The Importance of Connection and Belonging:** The film's exploration of the human need for connection and belonging can be seen as a reflection of the psychological benefits of social support. The formation of Fight Club as a collective experience can be interpreted as a search for meaning and a sense of community. The film suggests that strong social connections can play a vital role in mental health and well-being.

**The Role of Trauma:** The film hints at the possibility of childhood trauma in the narrator's life, which can contribute to the development of mental health issues. This highlights the importance of addressing trauma and its impact on mental health. The film suggests that unresolved trauma can have a profound and lasting effect on an individual's mental health and well-being.

Beyond these core themes, Fight Club also offers valuable insights into other aspects of mental health:

**The Impact of Societal Pressures:** The film's critique of consumerism and the emptiness of modern life highlights the psychological impact of societal pressures. The narrator's struggles can be seen as a reflection of the broader societal pressures that many individuals face today.

**The Importance of Self-Care:** The film emphasizes the importance of self-care and the dangers of neglecting one's own needs. The narrator's neglect of his own health and well-being ultimately leads to his descent into madness.

**The Power of Human Connection:** The film highlights the importance of human connection and the psychological benefits of social support. The formation of Fight Club, despite its violent nature, can be seen as a search for meaning and a sense of community.

In addition to exploring these themes, Fight Club also offers a provocative and challenging portrayal of mental illness. The film's ambiguous and complex characters can help viewers to recognize the complexity of mental health issues and avoid reducing individuals to simplistic labels. By breaking down stigma and promoting empathy, Fight Club can contribute to a more inclusive and accepting society. the tool for discussion and education about mental health issues. By critically analysing the film and providing viewers with additional resources, we can harness its potential to promote understanding, empathy, and a more inclusive society for individuals with mental illness.

## **THE POWER OF DISCUSSION**

Fight Club can be used as a catalyst for open and honest discussions about mental health. The film's complex and ambiguous portrayal of mental illness can encourage viewers to explore their own thoughts and feelings about the topic. By engaging in thoughtful discussions, individuals can challenge their own biases and stereotypes, and develop a greater understanding of the experiences of others.

### **Challenging Stereotypes**

The film's portrayal of mental illness can challenge harmful stereotypes and misconceptions. By examining the characters' struggles and behaviours, viewers can recognize the complexity of mental health issues and avoid reducing individuals to simplistic labels. This can help to break down stigma and promote a more inclusive and accepting society.

## **Promoting Empathy and Understanding**

Fight Club can also foster empathy and understanding towards individuals with mental illness. By exploring the characters' experiences from a psychological perspective, viewers can gain a deeper appreciation for the challenges they face. This can encourage viewers to be more compassionate and supportive towards individuals with mental health conditions.

## **The Importance of Critical Analysis**

While Fight Club can be a valuable tool for discussion and education, it is crucial to approach the film critically. The film's portrayal of mental illness is not without flaws, and it can perpetuate harmful stereotypes if not viewed in context. It is important to provide viewers with additional resources and information about mental health to ensure a balanced and accurate understanding.

## **CONCLUSION**

David Fincher's Fight Club is a thought-provoking movie that has caused a lot of discussion. While some people have criticized its depiction of mental health, it can also be used to talk about and learn about mental health issues. By carefully examining the film and suggesting other helpful resources, we can use it to encourage empathy, understanding, and a more welcoming society for people with mental illness.

Fight Club has had a significant impact on mental health discourse, sparking conversations about themes such as identity, consumerism, and the search for meaning. The film's exploration of these topics has resonated with audiences, prompting them to reflect on their own experiences and challenges. By raising awareness of these issues, Fight Club has contributed to a broader public conversation about mental health.

One of the most valuable aspects of Fight Club is its ability to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote understanding of mental health issues. The film's portrayal of the narrator's struggles and the enigmatic character of Tyler Durden can help viewers to recognize the complexity of mental illness and avoid reducing individuals to simplistic labels. By breaking down stigma and promoting empathy, Fight Club can contribute to a more inclusive and accepting society.

While Fight Club can be a powerful tool for discussion and education, it is crucial to approach the film critically. The film's portrayal of mental illness is not without flaws, and it can perpetuate harmful stereotypes if not viewed in context. It is important to provide viewers with additional resources and information about mental health to ensure a balanced and accurate understanding.

To gain a more in-depth understanding of Fight Club as a catalyst for mental health awareness, it is essential to explore the film's key themes and their relevance to mental health issues:

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health struggles. The film suggests that the pursuit of material possessions and social status can lead to feelings of emptiness, dissatisfaction, and even despair.

**The Dangers of Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms:** The film's exploration of violence and aggression as coping mechanisms can be seen as a warning about the potential consequences of unhealthy behaviours. The narrator's involvement in Fight Club can be interpreted to cope with underlying psychological issues. The film highlights the importance of finding healthy and constructive ways to manage stress and emotional distress.

**The Importance of Connection and Belonging:** The film's exploration of the human need for connection and belonging can be seen as a reflection of the psychological benefits of social support. The formation of Fight Club as a collective experience can be interpreted as a search for meaning and a sense of community. The film suggests that strong social connections can play a vital role in mental health and well-being.

**The Role of Trauma:** The film hints at the possibility of childhood trauma in the narrator's life, which can contribute to the development of mental health issues. This highlights the importance of addressing trauma and its impact on mental health. The film suggests that unresolved trauma can have a profound and lasting effect on an individual's mental health and well-being.

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# **THE INTERSECTION OF MEDIA, LITERATURE, AND MENTAL HEALTH: A STUDY OF TAYLOR SWIFT'S CAREER**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This academic paper deeply explores the intersection of media, mental health, and literature, focusing on the career of Taylor Swift. Examining this unravels the intricate connections between media representation, mental well-being, and literary influences. This study sheds light on the impact of media scrutiny on psychological health, the role of literature in creative expression, and the power of storytelling in navigating personal struggles. Through a focused examination, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of media, mental health, and literary elements within the broader cultural landscape.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Literature, Media, Mental Health, Taylor Swift.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The relationship between media, literature, and mental health is a compelling area of study, particularly in the modern age, where the lives of public figures are incessantly scrutinized by the media. Taylor Swift, one of the most prominent and influential singer-songwriters of the 21st century, offers a fascinating case study in this regard. Throughout her career, Swift has not only navigated the pressures of media scrutiny but has also incorporated literary references into her music as a means of exploring and articulating her mental health experiences. These references, which draw from works of classic and modern literature including Greek mythology and Fitzgerald, provide deeper insights into Swift's personal struggles and how she has used her art to reclaim her narrative from the media. This paper explores the intersection of media, literature, and mental health through the lens of Taylor Swift's career, focusing on how literary allusions in her music have served as both a reflection of and a response to the challenges she faces in the public eye.

### **Media's Impact on Mental Health**

Taylor Swift's relationship with the media has been a defining aspect of her career. From her early days as a country music star to her transformation into a global pop icon, Swift has been subject to relentless media scrutiny. This scrutiny has often focused on her personal life, particularly her relationships, leading to a pervasive narrative in the media that overshadows her artistic achievements. The effects of this intense media attention on Swift's mental health have been profound, as she has openly discussed in interviews and through her music.

The media's portrayal of Swift has often been contradictory. Initially, she was celebrated as a wholesome, "girl-next-door" figure in country music, but as she transitioned into pop, the media narrative shifted. Swift was frequently labeled as a "serial dater," with her relationships becoming fodder for tabloids and gossip columns. This constant scrutiny of her personal life has

contributed to a public perception that diminishes her professional accomplishments, reducing her to a series of headlines about her romantic endeavours. This relentless focus on her personal life has had significant implications for Swift's mental health. In interviews and her 2020 Netflix documentary "Miss Americana", Swift has spoken candidly about the anxiety and depression she has experienced as a result of living under the media's microscope. The pressure to maintain a flawless public image, coupled with the constant criticism she faces, has led to feelings of isolation and self-doubt. Swift's experiences highlight the broader issue of how media scrutiny can negatively impact the mental health of public figures, particularly women, who are often subject to harsher judgment and unrealistic expectations.

### **Literary References in Swift's Songwriting**

Taylor Swift's music is not only a reflection of her personal experiences but also a rich tapestry of literary references that add depth and complexity to her lyrics. These references serve as a means of exploring her mental health and critiquing the media narratives that have been constructed around her. By drawing on classic literature, Swift connects her personal struggles with broader, timeless themes, allowing her to articulate her emotions in a way that resonates with her audience. The song references Lewis Carroll's *\*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland\**. The lyrics use the imagery of falling down a rabbit hole to describe a whirlwind romance, mirroring Alice's disorienting journey in Wonderland.

The titular song on the album "Tortured Poets Department" mention Dylan Thomas and Patti Smith. This album also has many other literary references which can be seen in the songs, "Cassandra", named after the mythological figure Cassandra, who was cursed to prophesy the truth but never believed, this song deals with themes of being misunderstood and the frustration of seeing trouble ahead that others refuse to acknowledge., "The Albatross" which uses the symbol of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" where the animal is seen as a burden which is how she sometimes perceives herself. Another song inspired by literature in the album is "Peter" which draws from J.M. Barrie's "Peter Pan", the song talks of the feelings associated with being with someone who doesn't grow up.

Her sister albums, folklore and evermore, also contain many literary references. The first song on the former "The 1" has a line "roaring twenties, tossing pennies in the pool" which is a reference to F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby", she also references this work in the song "This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things" where she says "Feeling so Gatsby for that whole year". The song "Invisible String" explores the idea of fate and connection, similar to the concept of the "red thread" or "invisible string" in various mythologies and literature. It reflects on the idea that certain people are destined to cross paths, akin to themes in works exploring predestined connections. "Cardigan", one of the singles from the album, uses imagery associated with Peter Pan, symbolizing nostalgia and the desire to return to a simpler, more innocent time. It also has Aristotle's "A friend to all is a friend to none." The bonus song on this album, "The Lakes" alludes to the Romantic poets' idealization of nature, particularly the retreat to serene natural settings as a refuge from societal pressures. This is akin to the themes found in the works of poets like William Wordsworth and John Keats. In evermore, the song "Champagne Problems" mentions King Midas.

In one of her most famous songs, "Love Story", Swift makes many literary allusions including "Romeo and Juliet" and "The Scarlet Letter" She also mentions the latter work in her song on the album 1989 "New Romantics" where she said "We show off our different scarlet letters, trust me mine is better". In the same album she has a song, "Wonderland" which mentions

the Cheshire cat and a rabbit hole an indicator that it was influenced by Lewis Carroll's "The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland".

### **The Role of Narrative in Shaping Public Perception**

Narrative is a powerful tool in shaping public perception, particularly in the media's portrayal of celebrities. For Taylor Swift, the stories that the media constructs about her have had a profound impact on how she is perceived by the public. However, Swift has also used her music to reclaim these narratives, turning the media's stories on their head and employing literary techniques to offer her own version of events.

One of the most notable examples of Swift's use of narrative to critique media portrayals is her song "Blank Space" from the *\*1989\** (2014) album. In this song, Swift engages in a form of metafiction—a literary technique where the narrative self-consciously addresses the process of storytelling. The lyrics, "Got a long list of ex-lovers / They'll tell you I'm insane," directly reference the media's portrayal of Swift as a "man-eater" who goes through relationships quickly and leaves a trail of broken hearts. By adopting this persona, Swift plays with the idea of the "unreliable narrator," a common literary device where the storyteller's credibility is questioned. Through this, she critiques the media's tendency to create sensationalized and often misleading narratives about her life, while also demonstrating her awareness of these narratives and her ability to manipulate them.

Swift's use of narrative extends beyond her music to her public statements and interviews. She has been open about her mental health struggles, particularly the anxiety and depression that have resulted from media scrutiny. In *\*Miss Americana\**, Swift discusses the toll that public criticism and unrealistic expectations have taken on her, comparing her experience to that of a character in a novel whose every move is dictated by external forces. This comparison highlights the extent to which narrative—both in literature and in the media—can shape an individual's identity and mental health.

Swift's ability to reclaim her narrative is further demonstrated in her album *\*Reputation\** (2017), which was a direct response to the media backlash she faced following public feuds with other celebrities. In this album, Swift embraced the villainous persona that the media had constructed for her, using it as a means of reclaiming her power and rewriting her story. Songs like "Look What You Made Me Do" and "I Did Something Bad" reflect Swift's defiance and refusal to be defined by the media's narrative. By taking control of the story, Swift not only challenged the media's portrayal of her but also reasserted her agency as an artist.

### **The Therapeutic Role of Art and Literature**

Art and literature have long been recognized as powerful tools for processing emotions and coping with mental health challenges. For Taylor Swift, songwriting serves as a therapeutic outlet, allowing her to articulate her experiences and emotions in a way that is both personal and universal. This process of creative expression is evident in many of her songs, where she uses literary references and storytelling techniques to explore her inner world.

One of the most emotionally resonant examples of Swift's use of literature in her songwriting is the song "All Too Well" from her *\*Red\** (2012) album. This song, widely regarded as one of Swift's most powerful and personal works, recounts a painful breakup with vivid imagery and detailed narrative. The lyrics, "You call me up again just to break me like a promise / So casually cruel in the name of being honest," draw on the language of betrayal often found in

literature, reminiscent of the emotional depth in novels like Emily Brontë's *\*Wuthering Heights\**. The extended metaphor of the relationship as a broken promise evokes themes of loss and disillusionment central to many classic literary works. By framing her personal pain in literary terms, Swift not only makes sense of her own experience but also connects with her listeners on a deeper emotional level.

In her song "My Tears Ricochet" from *\*folklore\** (2020), Swift uses the metaphor of a haunted house to describe the aftermath of a toxic relationship. The lyrics, "You wear the same jewels that I gave you / As you bury me," conjure images of a ghostly presence lingering after death, a motif common in Gothic literature. This use of Gothic imagery reflects the lingering impact of trauma and the ways in which past experiences can continue to haunt an individual, much like the characters in novels such as Daphne du Maurier's *\*Rebecca\**. Through this song, Swift explores the theme of emotional haunting, illustrating how unresolved pain can continue to affect one's mental health long after the initial event.

Greek mythology also plays a significant role in Swift's exploration of therapeutic themes. In the song "The Archer" from her *\*Lover\** (2019) album, Swift references the mythological figure of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt and the moon, to explore themes of vulnerability and self-reflection. The lyrics, "I've been the archer, I've been the prey / Who could ever leave me, darling? But who could stay?" capture the duality of strength and fragility, echoing the internal struggles faced by many of Swift's listeners. By invoking these mythological themes, Swift connects her personal journey to the broader human experience, offering solace and understanding to her audience.

### **The Influence of Social Media on Mental Health**

The rise of social media has added another layer of complexity to the relationship between media, literature, and mental health. For Taylor Swift, social media has been both a platform for self-expression and a source of additional scrutiny. The pressures of maintaining a public persona online can exacerbate the mental health challenges that come with fame, as the boundary between private and public life becomes increasingly blurred.

In her song "You Need to Calm Down" from the *\*Lover\** (2019) album, Swift addresses the toxicity of online culture, particularly the ways in which social media can amplify negative behavior. The lyrics, "And I ain't tryna mess with your self-expression / But I've learned a lesson that stressin' and obsessin' / 'Bout somebody else is no fun," highlight the psychological toll of online hate and the importance of self-care. This song can be seen as a modern-day fable, where the moral of the story is the importance of rising above negativity and focusing on one's own well-being.

Social media has also provided Swift with a means of directly engaging with her fans, bypassing traditional media channels. This direct connection with her audience has allowed Swift to build a loyal fanbase and communicate her message on her own terms. However, this direct connection comes with its own set of challenges, as Swift has had to navigate the expectations and demands of millions of followers. The pressure to maintain a certain image online can lead to anxiety and burnout, issues that Swift has addressed in interviews and through her music.

The relationship between social media and mental health is a growing area of concern, particularly for younger generations who are often more susceptible to the pressures of online life. Swift's experience highlights the importance of finding a balance between using social media as a tool for connection and self-expression and protecting one's mental health from the potential

harms of digital exposure. By addressing these themes in her music, Swift not only raises awareness about the impact of social media on mental health but also offers her listeners a sense of solidarity and understanding.

## CONCLUSION

Taylor Swift's career serves as a compelling example of the intersection between media, literature, and mental health. Through her music, Swift has navigated the challenges of media scrutiny, using literary references to articulate her personal experiences and reclaim her narrative. By drawing on works like *The Scarlet Letter*, the novels of Charles Dickens, and Greek mythology, Swift connects her struggles with broader, timeless themes, offering her audience a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological impact of living in the public eye. Swift's ability to weave literary allusions into her songwriting not only enriches her music but also provides a therapeutic outlet for processing her experiences and emotions.

The media's portrayal of Swift has had a profound impact on her mental health, leading her to explore themes of isolation, judgment, and disillusionment in her music. However, Swift has also used her art to challenge these narratives, turning the media's stories on their head and asserting her agency as an artist. Her use of narrative techniques such as metafiction and the unreliable narrator allows her to critique the media's portrayal of her and reclaim control over her story.

Art and literature have long been recognized as powerful tools for coping with mental health challenges, and Swift's music is a testament to this. By drawing on literary references and storytelling techniques, Swift has created a body of work that resonates with listeners on a deeply emotional level, offering solace and understanding to those who may be facing similar struggles. As Swift continues to navigate the complexities of fame and public life, her music remains a powerful reflection of the intersection between media, literature, and mental health, demonstrating the enduring relevance of these themes in contemporary culture.

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# **PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NARRATIVE TRANSPORTATION: THE EFFECTS OF STORYTELLING ON MENTAL HEALTH AND PERCEPTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines how media portrayal and Narrative techniques affect the mental health. The methodology employed for the present research is mixed- methods strategy. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis is used to collect the data from a random sample collection. As per the latest research the psychological resilience and overall well-being of the individuals is greatly influenced by the emotional gratifying narratives and interesting media portrayals. Whereas the unenthusiastic and dismissive portrayals and substandard narratives escalate anxiety and undermines self-esteem. The dual potentiality of media depiction and narrative complexity is discussed and emphasizes on how these two factors contribute to elevate and distort mental health. The conclusion of this research is to aim for the positive reinforcement on the psychological well-being of the individuals by the careful and selective usage of the media and creating the narratives with moral and ethical concerns.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Psychological resilience, Narrative complexity, dual potentiality, portrayal, undermine.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The development of Technology in every realm has led to the globalization that has both positive and negative effects on the society. The globalization has virtually connected the global citizens throughout the world but has hindered the human relations drastically. As the dependency of the humans on technology is more rather than on other humans, leaving less scope for human interactions, moral values and ethical concerns at stake.

The less the interaction with the humans the more the psychological disorders such as stress, anxiety, anger issues bipolar disorder etc. The digital media and social networking such as Face book, Instagram, Twitter, Blogs, film and literature influence the people psychologically. As the viewers and audience relate with the characters in the novels, short stories and movies leave a lasting impact on the behaviour and character of the individuals.

The digital marketing has influenced the lives of the people to such an extent that it dictates the preferences of the individuals related to food, fashion, travel , education and entertainment etc.

## **What is Mental Health, Truly?**

Fundamentally, an individual's mental health is made up of emotional, psychological, and

social well-being. The feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are greatly influenced by the mental health. The ability of decision making, stress management and relating to others is also affected by the mental health. All human evolution from birth to maturity depend on mental well-being. The official definition has been created by WHO.

One of the major global concerns is mental health. The World Health Organization lists anxiety and depression as the two main causes of disability globally. We need interdisciplinary methods to treatment to handle this expanding epidemic, and narrative therapy is one that shows a lot of promise.

1.       Purging and Emotional Release: Narrating one's own story in a secure setting can help one feel emotionally released, which is important for mental health. Repressed feelings can cause tension and worry, yet storytelling provides solace and catharsis.

Self-contemplation and Awareness: Telling personal stories makes an individual consider one's past confrontations, decisions, and feelings. Self reflection is crucial to understand and manage mental health.

2.       Less Stigma: The open discussions related to mental health issues reduces the stigma associated with them. It serves as a source of inspiration, assistance and support for others.

3.       Empowerment: A deep sense of authority and liberation are experienced by the people as they share their stories. As a result of this they develop a comprehensive mental and physical well-being. The Listening and Empathy Healing Cycle .The benefits of storytelling go beyond one-on-one counselling. As healing as telling others' stories is, listening to them promotes empathy and connection. People who engage in active listening get a sensation of being heard and understood, which supports their sense of value.

People feel comforted and inspire others while they share their experiences to smash the stigmas related to mental health issues. Compassion, mutual understanding and mass healing are encouraged by this complex narrative technique.

Mental Health in the Workplace Employee's mental well-being is a major concern for the present business organizations. Therefore narrative therapy is not confined to the therapist's office but is more prominent and serves as a widely acknowledged effective tool in the workplaces.

In order to foster healthy and supportive work atmosphere the business organizations, identify the need to provide a safe environment where the staff members can share about their personal experiences and challenges. The employee support networks and resource groups as a common feature organise these narrative sessions for the employees who share their experiences associated with mental health. This practice reduces the stigma and fosters a healthy and supportive work environment.

Bibliotherapy is a form of creative arts therapy that uses literature to help people to improve their life by providing information, support, and guidance through reading books and stories. Books and other written material have a great impact on human emotions and provide wisdom, emotional connection, insight, and comfort. It is sometimes very difficult for the people to deal with the issues of anxiety , depression , coping with stress and grief and also the biggest challenge is to understand what kind of changes occur in the body and mind. The best way to bridge the gap is to adopt Bibliotherapy.

Bibliotherapy is also referred to as book therapy , reading therapy or therapeutic storytelling facilitates people in fostering empathy , intuition and self- compassion. To

understand their own experiences, the stories found in the books and other literary works were very useful for the people. The audience association with the books helped them in personal development by fostering negotiations with therapist.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Why is mental health a major global concern?
2. What are the factors influencing anxiety and depression?
3. How to address the challenges of the mental health?
4. How does Bibliotherapy and Narrative Transportation serve as healing remedies for mental issues?
5. What role does the media representation play on mental health?

## **HYPOTHESIS**

1. A positive and significant impact of story- telling and media representation on the mental health and psychological well-being of the individuals.
2. Low self-esteem and negative impact of story-telling and media representation on the mental health of the individuals.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand and analyse how the story –telling, narrative transportation and media representation serve as a healing therapy for the mental illness commonly prevalent among the individuals.
2. To examine how the narratives techniques of story-telling and media depiction leave a negative impact on the mental health of the individuals.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The media representation and storytelling leave a lasting impact on how people think, feel and act has been acknowledged since long. The intricate relationship between variety of narrative genres and psychological well- being has drastically increased in recent past. This introduction throws light on stupendous effects that media representation and storytelling can have on mental health, focusing the remarkable narrative multiplicity and the variety of ways that stories are narrated in different media.

The age-old tradition of narrating stories has multiple benefits in the society. Apart from fostering cultural and moral values, it aids in social cohesion and facilitates to comprehend and explore the external world. Irrespective of the medium – oral tradition, literature, movies or digital media, the intelligible and emotional level of the audience is deeply engaged by the stories.

The stories have the power to transport the people to new realms ,cause the individuals to think and analyse rationally towards the social and personal concerns, and to empathise with the characters. The media representation has a significant impact on the individual perceptions towards themselves and others, reflects how the variety of groups and identities are depicted in the media content.

Media representation influences how people perceive themselves and others to a great extent as different groups and identities are depicted in the media content. The audiences



delve deep and get engrossed in the story and are carried away to different portals with the psychological dual potentiality of the Narrative transportation, they empathize with the characters and think rationally about the social and personal concerns. Effective, undeniable and honest depiction of the characters authenticate experiences and improve mental health. On the contrary, unreliable and conventional representations can aggravate social hierarchies, reinforce pre conceived notions and leave a hazardous mental health issues. It is vital to decipher the dynamics of media representation in a society where in usage of media is penetrating and day to day experiences are influenced to a great extent by the media representation.

Narrative transportation is well-established idea that an immersive interaction of the individuals with a narrative has a profound impact on their perceptions and characters. A number of theoretical concepts are used to study the media representation and narrative on the mental health. The research has proved that the lessons and the concepts explained in the form of stories are more enjoyed and understood by the people. As they are transported into the story they show the compassion towards the characters of the story. This narrative transportation offers a sense of escape from the reality, new perception of self and the world at large while supporting a sense of oneness and also promotes the psychological and emotional well-being.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A significant study on the effects of storytelling and media representation on mental health has been conducted in various fields such as psychology, communication and media studies. The outcome of this research accentuates the drastic influence of storytelling and media representation on the mental health.

Green and Brock (2000) established the concept of narrative transportation, which is vital to comprehend the psychological effects of storytelling. They assert that fully engrossed in the story the audience relate with the characters and adapt multiple perspectives. This transformed perspectives and activities as a result of immersive experience enhances emotional well-being by developing a sense of understanding and connection.

In the similar line, Mar et al. (2006) ascertain the direct relationship between reinforced social cognition, emotional intelligence and regular habit of reading fictional books. It implies that the complex narratives elevates toughness of the mind and compassion.

This study focuses on the effects of media representation influences people's perception of themselves and how they perceive the world as a whole. According to Tajfel and Turner's (1986) discussion of social identity theory, media representations have an impact on how social identities are formed and maintained. Optimistic media depiction reduces the stigma, elevates mental health and authenticate the experiences of marginalized communities, whereas unreliable and conventional representations may adversely affect the mental health by supporting societal hierarchies and biases.

Dixon and Linz (2000), throws light on how stereotyped representation of racial minorities in the news media lead to prejudices and have a hazardous effect on public opinion, the social groups that are depicted feel distressed and less confident.

Gerbner and Gross (1976) were the pioneers who introduced the term "symbolic annihilation". They expressed the negative consequences of marginalized depiction of certain groups in the media. A feeling of in appreciable and under representation of racial

minorities leaves a negative impact on the mental health of such groups. This concept upholds the importance of the multiple and authentic media representation in order to facilitate all the groups experience a feeling of inclusiveness and connected in the society.

The therapeutic significance of the storytelling is also researched in the medical arena. Narrative transportation, storytelling and creative writing has a significant positive impact on mental health according to Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) as per their findings, the people who pen down their horrifying experiences had psychological and physical results.

According to this research, storytelling can promote psychological healing and resilience by helping people understand and make meaning of their experiences.

Researchers have also looked into the particular components of narratives that influence their psychological impact. Appel and Richter (2007) discovered that narratives with positive emotional content and well behaved characters enhance compassion and identification that have a positive impact on the mental health.

On the contrary the impact of media representation is not always positive sometimes it can prove to be negative. According to Gerbner et al. (1980), the cultivation theory contends

That the perceptions of the people towards real world is influenced greatly due to the continuous exposure to media content. According to the findings of a discovery a condition called “mean world syndrome” is suffered by the people who watch Television for a longer period of time. They perceive the world to be dangerous and hazardous. This research call attention to the possible harm caused due to the negative media depiction that leads to anxiety and depression effecting the mental health of the individuals.

In conclusion, the research indicates a subtle and a complex link between the effects of media depiction and storytelling on mental health. As discussed Social identity theory, expressive writing, and narrative transportation all focus on how the storytelling can improve mental health by promoting compassion, emotional resilience. On the contrary negative media depiction and symbolic annihilation draw attention to hazardous implications of increased depression and low self esteem among the marginalized groups. It is imperative to comprehend these dynamics in order to create the media content that is both more inclusive and supports mental health, which will finally lead to a society that is more empathetic and healthy.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A mixed methodology with a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques is adopted to investigate the influence of media depiction and narrative transportation on the psychological well-being of the individuals. This rigorous method of investigation aims to record the complex relationship between media representation, storytelling and psychological impact. The accurate tools engaged for this study, including sample selection, data collection techniques and the strategies engaged in analysing the data are described below

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A Structured questionnaire was administered to get quantitative data from a selected group of participants. The Likert scale was employed among a selected group of engineering students to capture their individual experiences related to the story telling,

media depiction and mental health. Questions related to the kind of stories the students enjoy reading, type of media they consume, what extent these stories influenced their thoughts and emotions, self perception and perception of the world as a whole are posed to them.

A small set of participants were interviewed in-depth to get qualitative data. The purpose of these interviews was to collect deeper insights of the individual experiences related to media portrayal and storytelling. Open-ended questions concerning the tales that the participants enjoyed reading, the kinds of media they watched, and the ways in which these stories influenced their feelings, ideas, and self-perception were posed to them. Participants' opinions on media representation were also questioned during the interviews, especially as it related to their own identities and communities. Semi-structured interviewing allowed for freedom in examining developing themes while maintaining coherence in the main subjects addressed.

## **ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES**

### **Qualitative Analysis**

A technique called thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative data from the interviews. This analysis entailed finding, examining, and summarizing patterns, or themes, within the data. Thematic analysis was carried out at multiple stages:

1. Data Familiarization: To obtain a thorough grasp of the topic, transcripts were read several times.
2. Coding: Recurring themes and concepts were used to categorize pertinent passages from the transcripts.
3. Theme Development: Codes were compiled into more general themes that encapsulate the viewpoints and experiences of the participants.

The themes underwent a review and refinement process to verify their accuracy in representing the facts and their coherence and differentiation from one another.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

#### **Data Analysis**

Respondent's profile, their attitude and approach towards particular question were measured with the descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and the measures of central tendency are employed. To describe the internal strength of the variables descriptive statistics such as measure of central tendencies, measures of variability and percentages are employed.

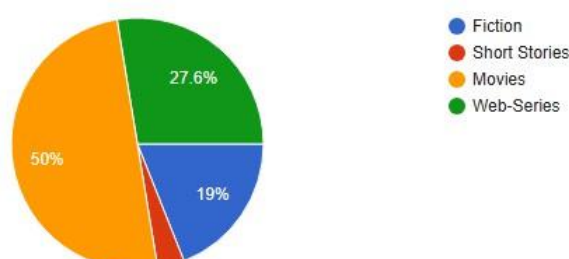
## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In terms of ethics, this study complies with the international ethical blueprint's guidelines for conducting research on human beings, upholding the ethical precepts of consent, privacy, and participant rights. Every participant in the survey and interview is made aware of the reason for their inclusion in the study, the fact that it is voluntary, and how the data will be used. Reporting schedules are implemented to guarantee that participant data is kept secret from outside parties. The survey records the individual experiences on the influence of the media representation and narrative transportation on the mental health. Not only the participant's rights and privacy is protected but transparent and equitable data is collected in order to communicate the findings in a way that does not lead to any preconceived notions and unequal results.

A detailed understanding of the complex relation between media depiction and mental health , storytelling is made possible by this perfectly designed research approach. This research dispenses thorough intuitions for the development of more comprehensive and encouraging media content by capturing the multiple ways in which storytelling influences mental health through the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

1.What type of stories you watch the most?

58 responses



### Overall Observations

- The chart shows the distribution of preferred story types among 58 respondents.
- Movies are the most popular choice, accounting for 50% of preferences.
- Web series is the second most popular choice, with 27.6% of respondents.
- Fiction and short stories are less popular, with 19% and 5.4% of respondents, respectively.

### Detailed Analysis

- **Movies:** The dominant preference, with half of the respondents choosing this format. This could indicate a preference for longer-form storytelling or a interest in cinematic experiences.
- **Webseries:** A significant portion of respondents (27.6%) This suggests a strong interest in storytelling and possibly binge-watching culture
- **Fiction:** A notable segment (19%) of the audience prefer traditional fictional narratives. This indicates a continued demand for well-developed characters and plotlines.
- **Short Stories:** The least preferred category, with only 5.4% of respondents. While Short Stories still attract. This suggests an appreciation for concise storytelling.
- The popularity of Web-Series suggests that platforms offering this format could attract a significant audience.
- Content creators could consider producing more movies with good content to cater to the existing demand.
- The relatively low preference for short stories might indicate a need for further exploration of factors influencing story choices.

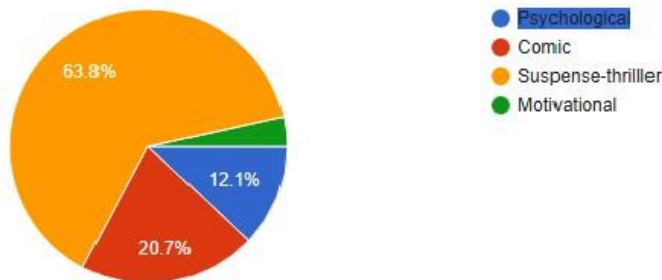
### Limitations

28. The sample size is relatively small (58 respondents), limiting the generalizability of the findings.
29. The chart doesn't provide information about the demographics of the respondents, which could influence their preferences.
30. Further Analysis
31. It would be interesting to analyze the data by demographic groups (e.g., age, gender) to identify any trends.

32. Conducting a larger survey could provide more robust insights into story preferences.
33. Overall, the data indicates a clear preference for the Movies and Web-Series among the respondents, with Fiction and Short Stories are less popular choices.

## 2. Genre you prefer to read/Watch?

58 responses



## DATA ANALYSIS: GENRE PREFERENCES

### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the genre preferences of 58 respondents. The data is categorized into four genres: Psychological, Comic, Suspense-Thriller, and Motivational.

### Key Findings

- Suspense-Thriller is the most preferred genre, accounting for 63.8% of the total responses.
- Comic :follows as the second most popular choice with 20.7% of respondents.
- Psychological and Motivational genres are relatively less preferred, with 12.1% and 3.4% respectively.

### Interpretation

The data indicates the popularity of suspense-thrillers suggests a significant audience for stories with suspenseful and thrilling elements. Whereas the next prominent choice for comic genre indicate a preference for light-hearted and entertaining content. Psychological and motivational genres, while less popular, still have a niche audience.

### Limitations

- The sample size is relatively small (58 respondents), limiting the generalizability of the findings.
- The data does not provide information about the demographics of the respondents, which could influence genre preferences.

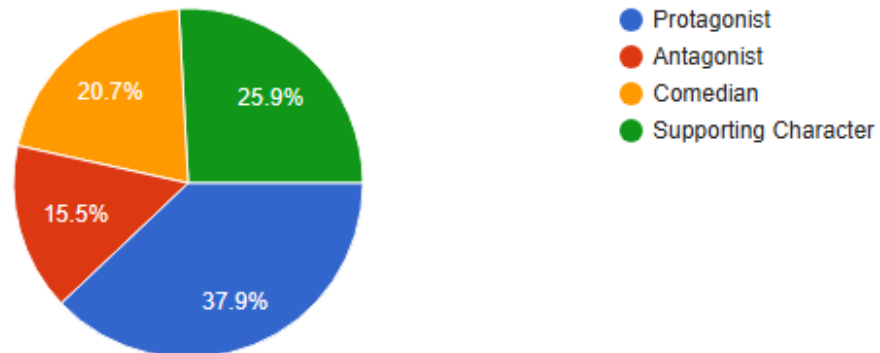
### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to:

- Increase the sample size to improve data reliability.
- Collect demographic information about the respondents to identify potential correlations between genre preferences and demographics.
- Explore other factors influencing genre preferences, such as reading/watching habits or personal interests.

### 3. Interested characters you like to watch or read that you can relate to your personality?

58 responses



#### Data Analysis

##### Key Findings

1. **Protagonist Preference:** The protagonist is the most preferred character type, with 37.9% of respondents choosing it. This suggests a strong inclination towards identifying with the main character of a story.
2. **Supporting Character Appeal:** Supporting characters are second most popular choice, with 25.9% of respondents choosing this category. This suggests a preference for characters with more prominent roles in the narrative.
3. **Comedian Following:** Comedians are the next most popular choice, accounting for 20.7% of respondents. This indicates a significant audience enjoys characters with comedic traits.
4. **Antagonist Interest:** Antagonists attract 15.5% of respondents, showing a considerable interest in complex and often morally ambiguous characters.

##### Interpretation

The data suggests a clear preference for characters who play central roles in the story, whether as protagonists or comedians. The interest in antagonists indicates an audience appreciation for complex and multifaceted characters. Supporting characters seem to hold good interest for the respondents, possibly due to their considerable contribution to the development of the plot.

##### Limitations

- The sample size (58 responses) is relatively small, limiting the generalizability of the findings.
- The chart doesn't provide information about the demographics of the respondents, which might influence their character preferences.

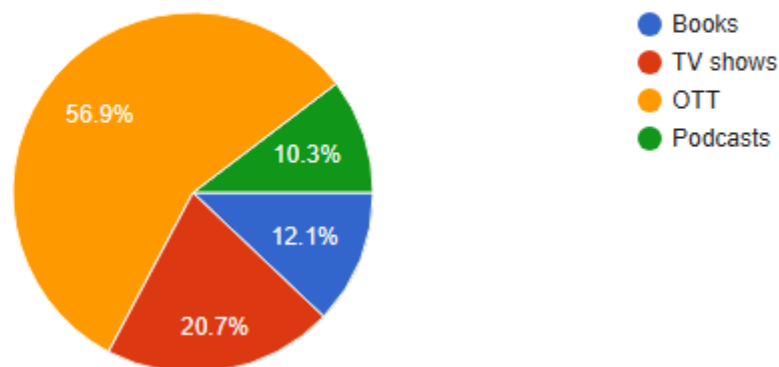
##### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to:

- Increase the sample size for a more representative analysis.
- Collect demographic data (age, gender, etc.) to explore potential correlations with character preferences.
- Conduct further research to understand the reasons behind the popularity of certain character types.

#### 4.Type of Storytelling media you consume?

58 responses



##### Overall Observations

- The chart illustrates the consumption preferences of 58 respondents in terms of storytelling media.
- OTT platforms emerged as the most consumed medium, accounting for 56.9% of responses.
- TV shows and Books as the limited consumed media, with 20.7% and 12.1% respectively.
- Podcasts hold the smallest share at 10.3%.

##### Key Insights

- OTT platforms, encompassing streaming services, are gaining traction
- Traditional television still holds a significant portion, despite the rise of digital platforms.
- Reading remains a less popular form of storytelling consumption, with books being the clear favorite for quiet few people.
- Podcasts, though growing in popularity, represent a smaller segment of storytelling consumption among the surveyed group.

##### Limitations

- The sample size of 58 respondents might not be representative of the entire population.
- The chart doesn't provide information about the demographics of the respondents, which could influence their media preferences.

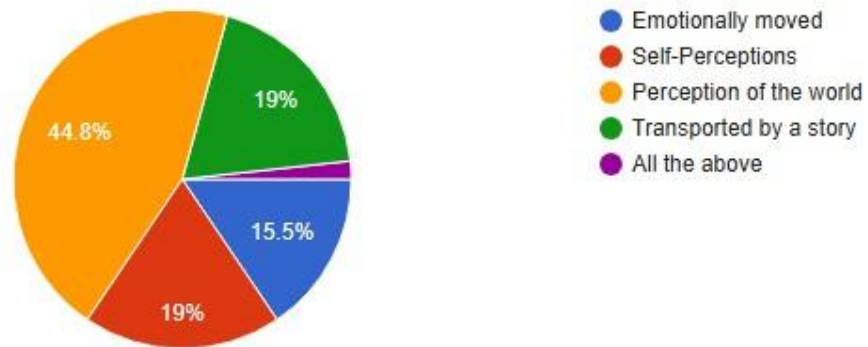
##### Further Analysis

- Analyzing the specific OTT platforms and podcast genres consumed could offer additional insights.
- To gain a deeper understanding, it would be beneficial to explore the reasons behind the popularity of books.
- Comparing these results to similar surveys over time would reveal trends in media consumption habits.

Overall, the chart highlights the diverse preferences in storytelling media, with OTT platforms leading the way, followed by TV shows, Books and podcasts.

## 5.How do these narratives affect you?

58 responses



### Data Analysis: How Narratives Affect Respondents

#### Overview

The pie chart illustrates how 58 respondents were affected by narratives they consumed. The data is categorized into five primary responses: Emotionally Moved, Self-Perceptions, Perception of the World, Transported by a Story, and All of the Above.

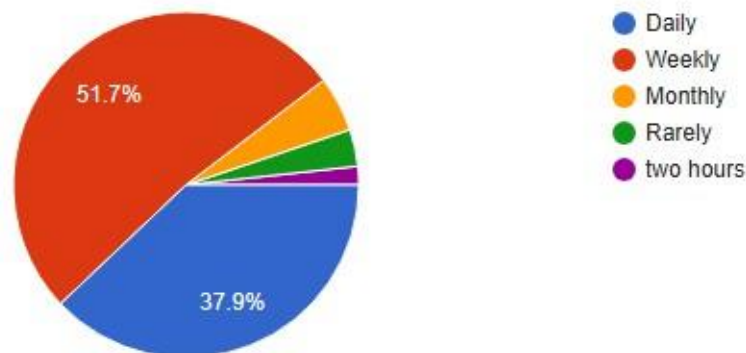
#### Key Findings

- **Broader Perspective:** "Perception of the World" was selected by 44.8% of participants, suggesting that narratives can shape individuals' understanding of the world around them.
- **Dominant Impact:** Being "Transported by a Story" is the most common effect, accounting for 19% of respondents. This suggests that narratives have a strong ability to immerse individuals in alternative realities.
- **Self-Reflection:** A significant portion (19%) of respondents reported that narratives influenced their "Self-Perceptions," highlighting the potential for personal growth and introspection through storytelling.
- **Emotional Resonance:** "Emotionally Moved" is the next response, with 15.5% of participants indicating that narratives evoke strong emotional reactions.
- **Comprehensive Impact:** A smaller group (1%) indicated that all of the listed options applied to them, demonstrating the multifaceted influence of narratives.



## 6. How often do you engage with storytelling media (books, movies, TV shows, etc.)?

58 responses



### Data Analysis: Frequency of Storytelling Media Engagement

#### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the frequency with which 58 respondents engage with storytelling media such as books, movies, and TV shows.

#### Key Findings

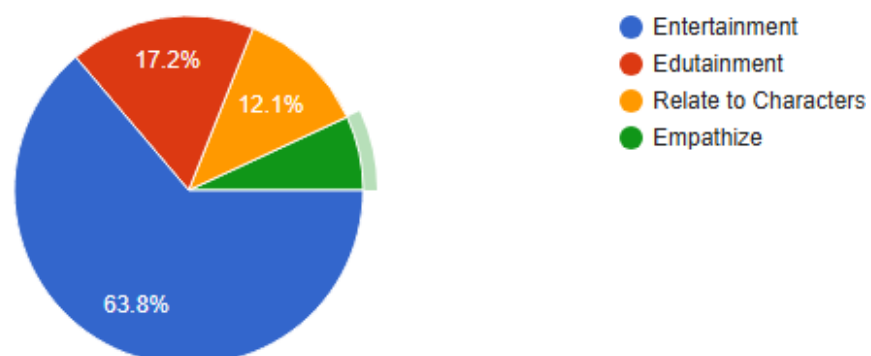
- **Weekly Engagement:** A significant portion (51.7%) engages with storytelling media on a weekly basis. This indicates a high level of storytelling media consumption among the surveyed group.
- **Daily Consumption:** The most prevalent engagement frequency is daily, accounting for 37.9 % of respondents.
- **Less Frequent Consumption:** The remaining categories, including monthly, rarely, and two hours, represent smaller percentages of the respondents. These categories combined account for approximately 10.4% of the total.

#### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to explore the types of storytelling media preferred by different frequency groups. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the high Weekly and daily consumption rate could provide valuable information about the role of storytelling in individuals' lives.

## 7. The reason for watching movies or web series?

58 responses



### Data Analysis: Reasons for Watching Movies or Web Series

## Overview

The pie chart presents the reasons why 58 respondents watch movies or web series, categorized into four primary motivations: Entertainment, Edutainment, Relating to Characters, and Empathizing.

## Key Findings

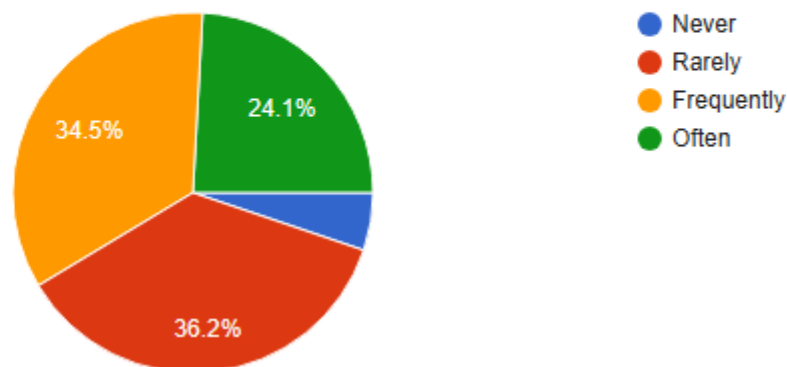
- **Entertainment Dominates:** The most significant reason for watching movies or web series is entertainment, accounting for a substantial 63.8% of responses. This indicates that the primary purpose for most viewers is leisure and enjoyment.
- **Edutainment and Character Connection:** Edutainment, a combination of education and entertainment, follows with 17.2% of respondents. This suggests a desire for both enjoyment and learning from the content. Relating to characters comes next, with 12.1% of viewers indicating that connecting with the characters is a key motivation.
- **Empathy as a Factor:** Empathizing with characters is the least cited reason, representing 6.9% of responses. While less prominent, it still suggests that some viewers value the emotional connection and understanding fostered by the content.

## Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to explore the specific types of movies or web series that fall into each category. Additionally, understanding the demographics of the respondents could provide valuable information about how age, gender, and other factors influence viewing motivations.

## 8. Have you ever felt emotionally moved or transported by a story?

58 responses



## Data Analysis: Emotional Impact of Stories

### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the responses of 58 individuals to the question of whether they have ever felt emotionally moved or transported by a story.

### Key Findings

- **Frequent Emotional Impact:** The majority of respondents (58.6%) indicated that they frequently or often experience emotional connections with stories. This suggests that stories have a significant emotional impact on a large portion of the surveyed group.
- **Rare Emotional Impact:** Approximately 36.2% of respondents reported rarely feeling emotionally moved or transported by stories, indicating a less frequent emotional connection.

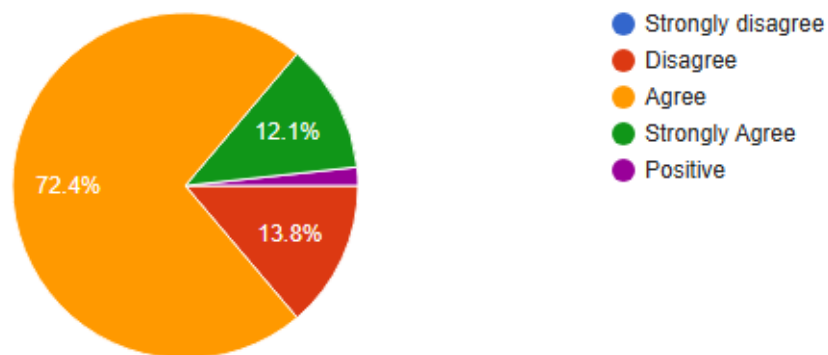
- **No Emotional Impact:** A smaller percentage (15.2%) never experience such emotional reactions to stories, suggesting a limited emotional engagement with narrative content.

#### Further Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding, it would be beneficial to explore the types of stories that tend to evoke emotional responses. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the varying levels of emotional connection could provide valuable insights into the factors influencing emotional engagement with narratives.

### 9. Do you believe that engaging with stories has helped improve your mental well-being?

58 responses



#### Data Analysis: Impact of Stories on Mental Well-being

##### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the responses of 58 individuals to the question of whether engaging with stories has helped improve their mental well-being.

##### Key Findings

- **Overwhelmingly Positive Impact:** A significant majority (72.4%) of respondents agree that engaging with stories has positively impacted their mental well-being. This indicates a strong correlation between story consumption and improved mental health.
- **Additional Positive Sentiment:** Combining the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories, we find that 86.2% of respondents reported a positive impact, further emphasizing the beneficial effects of stories on mental well-being.
- **Neutral or Negative Views:** A smaller proportion (13.8%) of respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, suggesting that for some individuals, stories may not have a significant impact on their mental well-being.

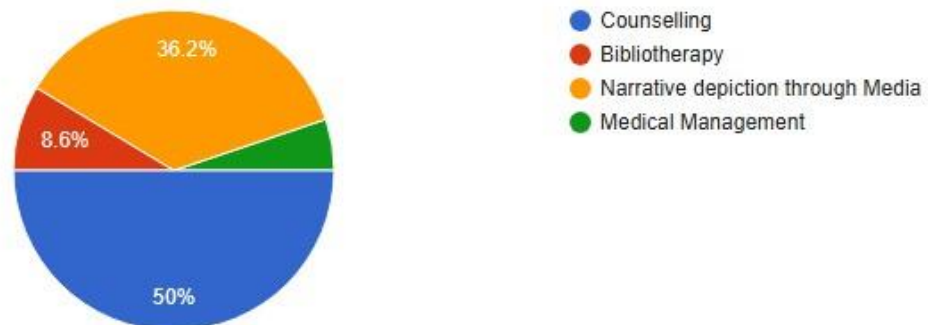
#### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to explore the types of stories that tend to have the most positive impact on mental well-being. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the neutral or negative responses could provide valuable information about factors influencing the relationship between stories and mental health.

## 10. The effective therapy for healing psychological issues like anxiety, depression, anger and stress .



58 responses



### Data Analysis: Effective Therapy for Psychological Issues

#### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the perceived effectiveness of different therapies for healing psychological issues like anxiety, depression, anger, and stress among 58 respondents.

#### Key Findings

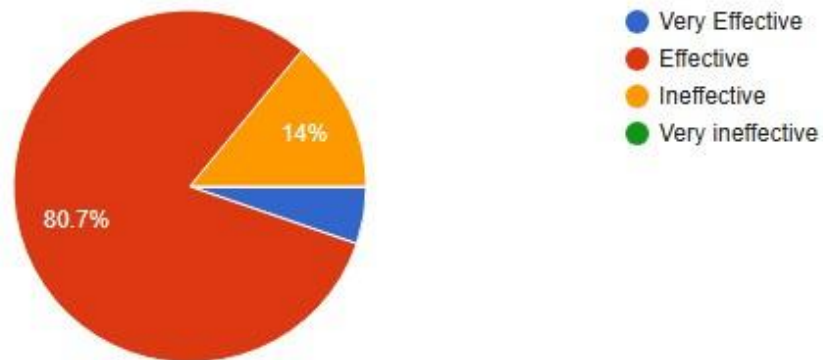
- **Counseling is the Most Effective:** Counseling emerges as the most effective therapy, receiving 50% of the votes. This suggests that traditional counseling methods are widely perceived as beneficial for addressing psychological issues.
- **Bibliotherapy and Narrative Depiction Hold Potential:** Bibliotherapy and narrative depiction through media share a combined 8.6 % and 36.2% of the responses, indicating that these approaches are also considered valuable in healing psychological issues.
- **Medical Management is a Less Preferred Option:** Medical management receives the lowest percentage of votes (5.2%), suggesting that it is less commonly perceived as an effective therapy for these specific psychological issues.

#### Further Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding, it would be beneficial to explore the specific psychological issues that respondents were facing when choosing their preferred therapy. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the preference for counseling and the potential benefits of bibliotherapy and narrative depiction could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of different therapeutic approaches.

11. Have you ever used storytelling or narratives as a form of self-therapy and if Yes, how effective did you find it?

57 responses



#### Data Analysis: Effectiveness of Storytelling as Self-Therapy

##### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the perceived effectiveness of storytelling or narratives as a form of self-therapy among 57 respondents.

##### Key Findings

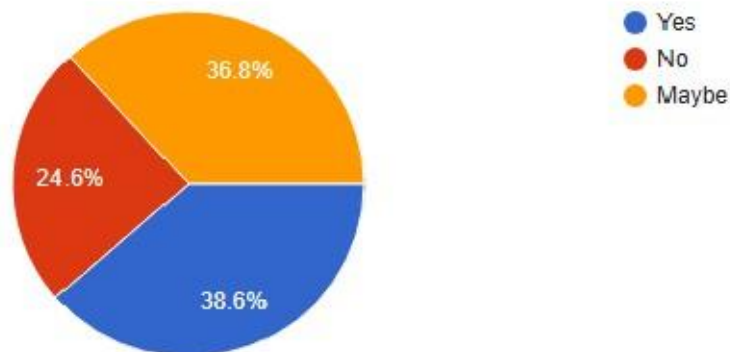
- **Overwhelmingly Positive Impact:** A significant majority (80.7%) of respondents rated the effectiveness of storytelling as self-therapy as "Very Effective." This suggests that storytelling is widely perceived as a potent tool for self-healing and personal growth.
- **Additional Positive Sentiment:** Combining the "Very Effective" and "Effective" categories, we find that 80.7% of respondents reported a positive impact, further emphasizing the beneficial effects of storytelling on self-therapy.
- **Neutral or Negative Views:** A smaller proportion (14%) of respondents rated the effectiveness as "Ineffective," suggesting that for some individuals, storytelling may not have a significant impact on self-therapy.

##### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to explore the types of storytelling or narratives that tend to have the most positive impact on self-therapy. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the neutral or negative responses could provide valuable information about factors influencing the effectiveness of storytelling as a therapeutic tool.

## 12. Have you ever encountered a story that left you feeling distressed or negatively impacted your mental health?

57 responses



### Data Analysis: Impact of Stories on Mental Well-being

#### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the responses of 57 individuals to the question of whether they have ever encountered a story that negatively impacted their mental health.

#### Key Findings

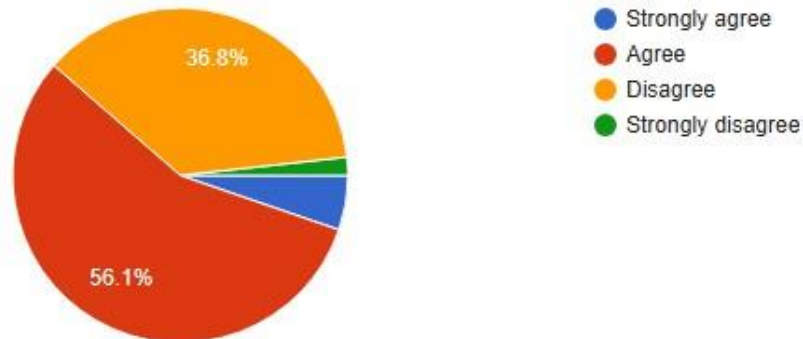
- **Significant Distress:** A notable 38.6% of respondents have experienced a story that left them feeling distressed or negatively impacted their mental health. This indicates that stories can have a significant negative impact on a considerable portion of individuals.
- **No Negative Impact:** Approximately 24.6% of respondents have never encountered such a story, suggesting that stories do not always have detrimental effects on mental well-being.
- **Uncertainty:** A group of 36.8% expressed uncertainty, indicating that the impact of stories on their mental health is less clear-cut.

#### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to explore the types of stories that tend to have a negative impact on mental well-being. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the uncertainty among some respondents could provide valuable information about the factors influencing the relationship between stories and mental health.

13. Do you think certain narrative techniques (e.g., graphic descriptions, suspenseful elements) can negatively impact mental health?

57 responses



### Data Analysis: Impact of Narrative Techniques on Mental Health

#### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the responses of 58 individuals to the question of whether certain narrative techniques (e.g., graphic descriptions, suspenseful elements) can negatively impact mental health.

#### Key Findings

- **Significant Concern:** A notable 56.1% of respondents "Agree" that such techniques can negatively impact mental health, indicating a significant concern about the potential detrimental effects of certain narrative elements.
- **Additional Agreement:** Combining the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories, we find that 56.1% of respondents express agreement with the statement, further emphasizing the belief that narrative techniques can negatively impact mental health.
- **Disagreement:** Approximately 43.9% of respondents ("Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree") do not believe that narrative techniques have a significant negative impact on mental health.

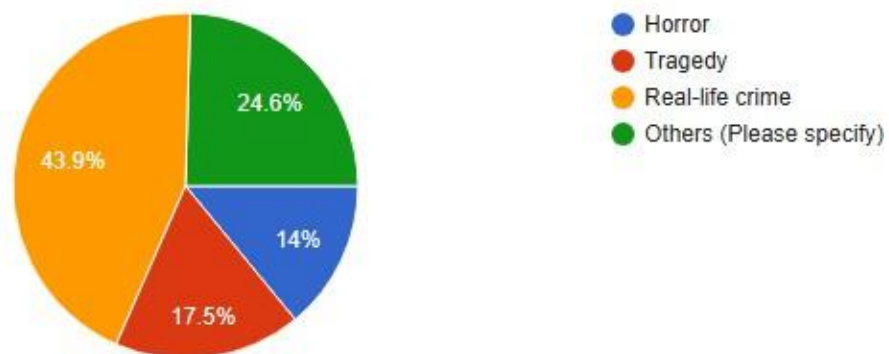
#### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to explore the specific narrative techniques that respondents perceive as having a negative impact on mental health. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the disagreement among some respondents could provide valuable information about factors influencing perceptions of the relationship between narrative techniques and mental health.



#### 14. Which types of narratives do you find most distressing?

57 responses



#### Data Analysis: Most Distressing Narrative Types

##### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the responses of 57 individuals to the question of which types of narratives they find most distressing.

##### Key Findings

- **Real-life crime:** This category emerges as the most distressing narrative type, with 43.9% of respondents selecting it. This indicates that narratives based on real-life criminal events have a significant impact on a considerable portion of individuals.
- **Tragedy:** Tragedy is the second most distressing narrative type, accounting for 17.5% of responses. This suggests that narratives depicting tragic events evoke strong emotional responses in many individuals.
- **Horror:** Horror narratives are the third most distressing type, with 14% of respondents selecting it. This indicates that horror stories can be unsettling for a significant portion of the audience.
- **Others:** A smaller percentage (24%) of respondents chose the "Others" category, suggesting that there are additional narrative types that can be distressing but are not explicitly listed in the chart.

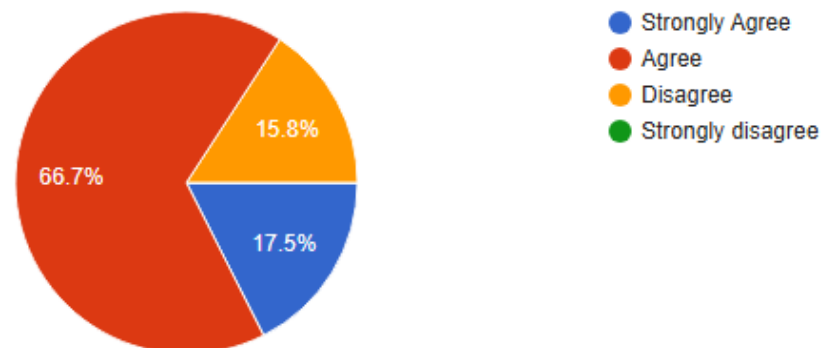
##### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to explore the specific types of real-life crime, tragedy, and horror narratives that are most distressing to individuals. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the selection of the "Others" category could provide valuable information about other distressing narrative types.



## 15. Do you believe that the way mental illness is portrayed in media can affect the audience's perception of their own mental health?

57 responses



### Data Analysis: Impact of Media Portrayal on Mental Health Perception

#### Overview

The pie chart illustrates the responses of 57 individuals to the question of whether the way mental illness is portrayed in media can affect the audience's perception of their own mental health.

#### Key Findings

- **Overwhelming Agreement:** A significant majority (66.7%) of respondents "Strongly Agree" that media portrayal can affect their perception of mental health, indicating a strong belief in the influence of media on mental health attitudes.
- **Additional Agreement:** Combining the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories, we find that 84.2% of respondents express agreement, further emphasizing the widespread belief in the impact of media portrayal on mental health perception.
- **Disagreement:** A smaller proportion (15.8%) of respondents ("Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree") do not believe that media portrayal significantly affects their perception of mental health.

#### Further Analysis

To gain deeper insights, it would be beneficial to explore the specific types of media portrayals that respondents perceive as having the most significant impact on mental health perception. Additionally, understanding the reasons behind the disagreement among some respondents could provide valuable information about factors influencing perceptions of the relationship between media and mental health.

## OVERALL DATA ANALYSIS

The provided data reveals a complex relationship between individuals and storytelling. Stories have a profound impact, with a majority experiencing emotional connections and perceiving them as beneficial for mental well-being. However, the potential for negative impacts is evident, particularly with distressing narratives and certain narrative techniques. Counselling is the preferred method for addressing psychological issues, but bibliotherapy and narrative depiction are also seen as effective. While media portrayal of mental illness influences perception, the data emphasizes the powerful role of storytelling as both a therapeutic tool and a potential source of distress. Overall, the findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the human-story interaction, highlighting both its potential for healing and harm.

Note: This analysis is based on the assumption that the data represents a diverse and representative sample population.

#### Outcomes and Findings:

The study's findings demonstrate the rich and complex influence that media portrayal and storytelling have on psychological health. Numerous important conclusions were drawn from the data gathered through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews.

### **QUALITATIVE RESULTS**

Thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews revealed recurrent themes that show how media depiction and storytelling impact people's mental health. A common opinion of the participants was that emotionally rich and complex stories offered a feeling of escape, which elevated their spirits and reduced stress levels. Depiction of the stories related to the individuals and the circumstances that were relatable to the reader encouraged compassion and a sense of connection, which improved emotional resilience and social awareness. On the other hand, the emotions of isolation, depression and low self-esteem were expressed by the participants as a result of unreliable and conventional media depictions.

### **QUANTITATIVE RESULTS**

A remarkable relationship between narrative transportation, media representation and mental well-being were the result of the quantitative study. There seems to be a positive association between compassion, self-esteem and narrative transportation, suggesting that the deeper immersion in the story enhances both emotional and psychological well-being. Furthermore, accurate, hybrid and indiscriminate media representations led to the reduced levels of anxiety and increased levels of self-esteem. On contrary the unauthentic and conventional media representations were directly associated with increase in the anxiety and lowered self-esteem among the majority of the respondents.

The technique of multiple regression analysis to analyse the quantitative data demonstrates that there was a positive impact on the mental health was eminent due to both narrative intensity and complexity. The emotional resilience and cognitive engagement were more specifically linked to narratives that were more complex in nature, whereas stories that were more shattered were linked to higher levels of emotional responses, which could be either positive or negative based on the context.

According to the data analysis it emphasises that narratives have a profound impact on individuals, with the ability to transport, evoke emotions, shape self-perception, and broaden worldviews. The significance of "Transported by a Story" suggests that escapism and immersion are key elements of the narrative experience for many. Though the data infers that entertainment is the primary driving force for watching movies and web series among the surveyed group. However, a notable proportion of viewers also seek educational value and emotional connections through the content. These findings suggest that a diverse range of motivations influence viewing preferences.

The data collected overwhelmingly suggests that engaging with stories has a positive influence on mental well-being for the majority of respondents. This finding highlights the potential therapeutic and uplifting role that stories can play in individuals' lives. The data suggests that counselling is the most preferred and perceived effective therapy for addressing psychological issues like anxiety, depression, anger, and stress among the surveyed group. Bibliotherapy and narrative depiction through media also hold significant potential as therapeutic approaches. Medical management appears to be a less

favoured option based on the given data. This finding highlights the potential therapeutic and transformative power of storytelling in personal healing and growth.

Stories can have a significant negative impact on the mental well-being of a substantial portion of individuals. While a significant number of respondents have not experienced such negative effects, the overall findings highlight the potential for stories to negatively impact mental health. A significant portion of respondents express concern about the potential negative impact of certain narrative techniques on mental health. While a considerable number of respondents disagree with this notion, the overall findings highlight the need for further exploration of the relationship between narrative techniques and mental well-being. Real-life crime narratives are perceived as the most distressing by the surveyed individuals, followed by tragedy and horror. While the "Others" category indicates the existence of other distressing narrative types, the provided data primarily focuses on these three categories. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data analysis has enabled a comprehensive understanding of the influence of media depiction and storytelling. The findings of the mixed analysis highlights the double-edged character of media narratives: positive and multiple narratives can promote mental health by supporting compassion and resilience, on the contrary depressing and marginalized depictions can hinder mental health by supporting preconceived notions and escalates the feelings of isolation.

This research concludes that for the positive mental health needs mindful media creation and consumption. A more empathetic and psychologically resilient society can be supported by the media creators by incorporating narrative multiplicity and assurance to develop a variety and authentic depictions. These findings have important consequences on the educators, administrative authorities and media developers, who aim to influence mental health by storytelling.

The study's conclusions highlight the significant influence that media depiction and storytelling have on psychological health.

The possibility of rich and immersive stories that serves therapeutic is highlighted by the positive relation between mental well-being and narrative involvement. Such kind of narratives develop compassion and self perception and perception of the world and also provides the audience the mental and emotional mechanism to handle social and personal challenges.

On the contrary the hazardous repercussion of unrealistic or conventional media depictions advocate the importance of creating media with much awareness. As conventional and marginalized depictions possess the power to emphasise societal preconceptions, that results in leaving the marginalized groups with more depressed and low self-esteem.

These findings are compatible with the earlier studies (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Dixon & Linz, 2000) on symbolic annihilation and the hazardous effects of marginalization and misrepresentation in the media. The dual potentiality of the narrative transportation is an important concern of this study. The media content and multiplicity of narrative complexity play a significant role in either elevating the emotions or causing emotional volatility. Thus the media creators and content writers need to strike a balance between responsible narratives and emotional engagement.

This study concludes with the possible recommendations for the media and content developers that well developed techniques are to be adopted for the production of the

media content. As media is an effective equipment for improving mental health and for the construction of the more strong and compassionate society by incorporating narrative multiplicity and authentic depiction through media. These dynamics ought to be further researched in future studies, with reinforcing on certain narrative components and their implications on the mental well-being of the diverse population.

### **Limitations: Suggestions for Future Implications**

The study's conclusions point to a number of significant futures

#### **1. Creation of Media Content:**

**Narrative Multiplicity:** Complex, fascinating and gripping narratives that fosters rational analysis, logical inquiry and compassion must be necessarily considered by the media creators. With the depiction of diverse characters and complex narrative plots aids to promote social awareness and emotional resilience among the audience.

**Diverse Representations:** In order to promote emotional connection and mental health, it is crucial to present the truthful and multiple depictions in the media. The media content creators have to pay special attention to integrate a variety of perceptions and experiences, especially the marginalized groups.

**2. Educational Programs:** It is essential to provide media literacy courses that educate the students how to analyse and assess the media content rationally, must be integrated into the educational programs. This awareness of how attitudes and perceptions are influenced by the media depiction enable people to take prejudiced decisions.

**Narrative transportation:** The exposure of a variety of narratives including those from other countries and background, improves students compassion and social intelligence. Teachers facilitate the group discussions and conversations based on a variety of narratives and their influences by using books, movies and other media.

**3. Policy Development:** Principles and regulations ought to be set by the administrative authorities to encourage the accurate and motivational depictions through the media. Certain rules to be followed strictly by the content creators and media platforms to enhance the positive representation of the multiple social groups.

**Encouragement for the underrepresented groups:** The Lawmakers ought to encourage the underrepresented groups to create and distribute the media content that can eliminate negative conventional depictions and encourage authorise depictions.

**4. Further study: Extensive studies:** As a part of future study, the research on the long-term influence of media usage on mental health to be conducted. For a deeper understanding the ways in which the storytelling affects mental health, tracking the shifts over time has to be monitored.

**Interdisciplinary Approaches:** By incorporating objectives of other disciplines such as sociology, psychology and communication studies, the analysis of how media depiction and storytelling influence mental health can be assessed. This interdisciplinary research investigates the relationship between effects of media, social identities and story telling.

**Technological Impact:** With the development of digital media and interactive narrative platforms, future research must focus on the emergence of how new technologies impact narrative transportation and media depiction. Social media, virtual reality provide opportunity for the research immersive experiences and effects on the mental health.

The application of storytelling in the therapeutic settings can be incorporated by the therapists through the use of therapeutic storytelling. Creative writing and narrative

therapy are the two important techniques that encourages emotional strength and mental health by enabling people in processing their emotions and experiences.

**Community-Based Projects:** Community organizations might use storytelling techniques to promote social connectedness and mental health. A strong support system and a sense of oneness can be fostered through the exchange of individual and group narratives. The power of media depiction and storytelling in enhancing the mental health encourages a comprehensive and a more compassionate and healthy society by addressing these future prominence.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research has shed light on the complex connections that exist between media representation, storytelling, and psychological health, highlighting the possibility for transformation as well as the inherent dangers of narrative participation. Through the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data, this study uncovered a number of important findings that highlight the significance of creating and consuming media with mindfulness. The beneficial relationship that exists between psychological resilience and narrative involvement emphasizes the therapeutic advantages of complex and engaging storytelling. Good stories that develop emotional intelligence, dispel cognitive framework, and increase empathy have a good impact on mental health outcomes.

On the other hand, inaccurate or conventional media representations have the potential to reinforce hazardous conventional depictions and worsen psychological suffering, especially for underrepresented groups.

The results also highlight how important narrative intensity and complexity are in influencing emotional reactions and cognitive engagement. These narrative components highlight the importance of responsible storytelling techniques by having a significant impact on how people perceive and digest media content.

In the future, it will be crucial for educators, lawmakers, and media producers to lay emphasis on truthful and diverse depictions while using the narrative power to promote social narratives that are inclusive and encouraging. We can leverage the power of narrative to build empathy, resilience, and overall psychological well-being in individuals and communities alike by promoting ethical media practices and raising awareness of media literacy.

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# MADNESS OR NO MADNESS, CREATIVITY PERSUADES

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to explore the portrayal of alcoholism and substance use as central themes in the lives of artists, exemplified by the Bollywood film 'Rockstar'. The primary objective of this paper is to challenge the notion that such behaviors are intrinsic to the creative process. Through a review of existing research in this field, it becomes evident that while numerous artists, writers, and philanthropists have produced remarkable works while under the influence of substances, this phenomenon does not substantiate the claim that creativity is exclusively tied to intoxication. Rather, it is essential to recognize that artistic expression can flourish independently of substance use, highlighting the diverse pathways through which creativity can be achieved.*

## KEYWORDS

*Madness, substance use, creativity, Bollywood movie 'Rockstar', mental health, psychopathology.*

## INTRODUCTION

The extract from one of Aristotle's passage:

"Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of a melancholic temperament, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile?"

Here, Aristotle is referencing the ancient Greek concept of "melancholia," which was associated with an excess of black bile, one of the four humors, and was believed to lead to both creative genius and mental disturbances. This idea contributed to the long-standing association between creativity and madness in Western thought. Although the idea has been discussed and expanded by many philosophers and psychologists over the centuries, the specific association of madness with artistic creativity is often traced back to Aristotle's observations.

In earlier times, the notion that "Artists are mad people" might have been more readily accepted, but in today's context, such a statement is increasingly difficult to uphold. The reason for this shift lies in the modern understanding that most professions require a high degree of skill, talent, and creativity to achieve success. These attributes are cultivated through consistent practice, dedication, and discipline. Professions such as medicine, academia, and architecture all demand not only technical expertise but also innovative thinking to excel. During the era of Plato and Aristotle, these philosophers, though themselves creators of great literary works, often did not fully acknowledge the critical importance of artists. However, the contemporary perspective recognizes that creativity, far from being synonymous with madness, is an essential component of excellence across a wide range of professional fields.

Many renowned writers, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Tennessee Williams, Jack Kerouac, Charles Baudelaire, Thomas de Quincey, Edgar Allan Poe, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charles Dickens, Dorothy Parker, W.B. Yeats, and Allen Ginsberg, have grappled with issues of alcohol and drug abuse. While their works are celebrated globally and have endured through the ages, it is undeniable that many of these authors produced their writing under the influence of various substances. For instance, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's most famous poem, "Kubla Khan," was inspired by a dream experienced while he was heavily intoxicated on opium.

There is a prevailing belief that for artists to achieve creativity and success, they must endure some form of mental hardship, which allows them to access the deeper truths of their art. While this may hold true for some individuals, it is not universally applicable. Undoubtedly, art often arises from struggle; however, it does not necessarily follow that one must experience a breakdown or succumb to addiction to achieve success in their creative endeavors. Instead, creativity can emerge from a variety of life experiences and states of mind, emphasizing the diverse pathways through which artistic expression can manifest.

While numerous writers from the Romantic era to contemporary times have produced significant works while under the influence of substances, it is essential to recognize that their success could have been achieved without intoxication as well. The true essence of art lies not in external factors but in the perception of the observer, paralleling the belief that the authenticity of creation is rooted in the dedication of the creator. A committed and creative individual can attain significant success over time, irrespective of their circumstances.

Some artists intentionally seek mental turmoil as a means to achieve recognition. A notable example is the Bollywood film "*Rockstar*," directed by Imtiaz Ali and featuring Ranbir Kapoor and Nargis Fakhri in lead roles. Hindi cinema has a long tradition of exploring themes related to mental illness, its origins, and the impact on the families of the central characters. The movie "*Rockstar*" similarly suggests that pain and heartbreak are integral to becoming a successful artist. Although the film is fictional, Ali has stated in interviews that the character of Janardhan/Jordan, portrayed by Kapoor, was inspired by a real-life 'Jat' friend from Pitampur, a small town near Delhi.

Although the film does not explicitly present itself as a biopic, there are rumors that certain elements are drawn from the life of a musician. As the narrative unfolds, Jordan evolves from a naive and innocent youth into a rude, violent, and carefree individual. The film posits that an artist can only achieve true success through profound personal suffering. One of Jordan's elder friends advises him, "One doesn't simply become a great artist; one has to undergo pain, suffering, and plenty of hardships in order to succeed." In his pursuit of artistic greatness, Jordan consciously seeks out pain and heartbreak, yet initially does not achieve the success he desires. As the movie progresses, it is only through experiencing genuine heartbreak and enduring trauma and stress that he ultimately transforms into a celebrated singer on the global stage. This portrayal raises important questions about the relationship between personal suffering and artistic achievement, suggesting that while hardship can be a catalyst for creativity, it is not a prerequisite for success.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 1) The Sylvia Plath Effect

Kelly Leung discusses “The Sylvia Plath Effect,” a phenomenon named after the writer’s own life experiences in her work “*Mad genius: Sylvia Plath’s manic depression and poetic writing*”. In her analysis, Leung explores how Plath’s mental illness significantly influenced her writing. She compares and contrasts Plath’s works through two opposing literary theories: Freudian psychoanalysis and Saussure’s structuralism. Plath’s final poem, “Edge,” serves as a poignant symbol of death, representing the conclusion of both her poem and her life.

In the realm of psychology, "The Sylvia Plath Effect" refers to the correlation between an artist’s mental illness and their creativity. This phenomenon posits a definitive link between mental health issues, such as bipolar disorder, trauma, and depression, and exceptional creative output. The effect is derived from the life and work of the American poet Sylvia Plath, who struggled with mental illness, a struggle that is often evident in her writing, and ultimately ended her life by suicide.

In her paper titled “Mad Genius,” Leung examines the stereotypes surrounding mental illness in relation to creativity. She supports her argument with the assertion that “gifted people are prone to mental illness,” suggesting that heightened intelligence and creativity can sometimes lead to madness. This exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between mental health and artistic expression.

### 2) Psychiatric Morbidity Rates in creative and non-creative individuals

K.S Pavitra et al in their work, “Creativity and mental health: A profile of writers and musicians” published in the Indian journal of psychiatry aim to explore the relationship between creativity and mental health by comparing psychiatric morbidity, stress, coping skills, and personality traits between creative (writers and musicians) and non-creative individuals. There were nearly forty writers and musicians chosen for examination who met certain criteria. The subjects were examined on General Health Questions as well as some specific parameters designed. Creativity has evolved through three stages: Initially seen as a divine gift in ancient and medieval times, it later became linked to inherited genius during the Renaissance, and finally, psychological and contextual influences gained recognition. Even after intriguing the nature of different artists, the relationship between creativity and insanity might be apocryphal. Art serves as a path to the sacred, even in a fragmented world, underscoring the need to support creativity and address mental health with evidence-based approaches. While biographical studies suggest that eminent writers experience more mental health issues than other creators or the general population, these findings should be interpreted cautiously due to posthumous diagnoses and inconsistent criteria. The study aimed to address previous methodological flaws by using a randomized sample, a control group, and structured assessments of psychopathology, personality, stress, and coping skills.

### **3) Madness and Creativity**

Vanya Goel in her article *“Exploring The Link Between Creativity And Insanity: Why Do Artists Tend To Go Mad?”* dated Sept 18, 2021 discusses the relationship between madness and creativity is often overstated, as creativity is not a product of insanity. Historical examples illustrate this point, such as Vincent van Gogh, the 19th-century painter who famously suffered from mental health issues, culminating in the infamous incident in which he severed his own ear. Another contemporary example she states is pop singer Britney Spears, who, after enduring significant legal struggles that resulted in the termination of her conservatorship, infamously shaved her head.

Instances of erratic behavior have been observed among numerous writers, musicians, and actors throughout history. However, such behaviors do not substantiate the argument that creativity necessitates madness or substance use. This discourse has persisted for centuries, suggesting that a lack of expression of thoughts and emotions may lead individuals to exhibit manic behavior or resort to substance abuse.

Goel in this particular article contends that creativity need not be intrinsically linked to mental illness. While there are occasions when artists may experience mental health challenges, these issues can often be addressed and treated effectively with proper support and intervention. Ultimately, she concludes saying, the narrative that creativity is dependent on madness requires reevaluation in light of a more nuanced understanding of mental health and artistic expression.

### **4) An Examination by J. Herman Kleiger**

In his article *“Can the Creative Be Mad and the Mad Be Creative?”* psychologist J. Herman Kleiger explores the complex relationship between creativity and madness. He recounts a conversation between the Irish writer James Joyce and psychologist Carl Jung regarding Joyce’s daughter, who was suffering from what was then referred to as “Dementia Praecox” (an antiquated term for schizophrenia). While Jung’s insights suggest a potential link between madness and creativity, Kleiger emphasizes that no definitive evidence currently supports this claim.

Kleiger argues that an artist possesses a heightened awareness and operates consciously with logic, maintaining full control over their cognitive faculties. He cites the example of the renowned comedian Andy Kaufman, whose unconventional death was perceived by some as an absurd stunt. When questioned about Kaufman’s mental state, a friend responded, “Why yes, he was...but he worked awfully hard at it!”

Kleiger concludes by cautioning against the assumption that one cannot achieve creativity without being mentally unstable. He encourages a reevaluation of the notion that madness is a prerequisite for creative inspiration, asserting that individuals can engage in creative pursuits without the necessity of experiencing insanity.

## **1. Systematic Review on Creativity and Psychoactive Substance Use**

In the thesis titled “Creativity and Psychoactive Substance Use: A Systematic Review,” authored by Fruzsina Iszaj, Mark D. Griffiths, and Zsolt Demetrovics in October 2017, a variety of research was conducted on both common individuals and artists who engage in substance use. The authors examined fourteen empirical studies and five case studies to investigate the relationship between the artistic process and the use of psychoactive substances. The study considers the works of numerous artists from both historical and contemporary contexts who created their art—be it writing, singing, painting, or other forms—while under the influence of various substances.

The excerpt highlights two distinct areas of research within the broader examination of creativity and psychoactive substance use. Some studies focus on the immediate effects of substances on creativity within controlled environments, while others explore the long-term associations between creativity and chronic substance use. These two approaches are fundamentally different; the former investigates acute changes in specific cognitive functions, whereas the latter examines the broader, long-term impacts on artistic production.

Moreover, the excerpt indicates that the studies reviewed exhibit considerable variability in their objectives, methodologies, and overall quality, underscoring the need for careful interpretation of the findings. This variability suggests that while there may be interesting correlations between substance use and creativity, the relationship is complex and warrants further investigation.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Relationship Between Emotional Distress, Creativity, and Substance Use**

Counselors often recommend that individuals write down their thoughts and feelings when experiencing emotional distress. This practice raises two important questions: why is this approach effective? and what is the relationship between creativity and mental health? The answer to both inquiries lies in the cognitive processes involved in emotional expression. Engaging in any form of artistic expression during periods of emotional turmoil can serve as a mechanism for purging negative emotions and alleviating stress.

A relevant Buddhist proverb states, "Holding onto anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; the person holding the coal is the one who gets burned." This saying emphasizes that harboring anger ultimately harms the individual. Similarly, throughout history, some individuals have turned to psychoactive substances as a means of coping with stress and depression. While the art produced during these periods may achieve notable success, it is crucial to understand that the creativity displayed is often a result of the emotional release experienced rather than a direct effect of substance use.

The portrayal of artists, writers, and poets as inherently mad or troubled has permeated various cultures; however, these notions remain largely theoretical and unproven. Some researchers suggest that creative individuals may be more susceptible to depression and mental illness. This raises the question: does the act of creating lead to mental health issues, or does the pursuit of artistic expression serve as an escape from underlying psychological problems, potentially leading to substance abuse?

Examining literature and research in this field can provide insights into this complex relationship. For instance, Jim Morrison, the iconic frontman of The Doors, battled chronic alcoholism throughout his adult life and experimented with a range of psychoactive substances, including tobacco, cannabis, LSD, mescaline, cocaine, and heroin. Reports suggest that his substance use was primarily for pleasure and as a coping mechanism rather than as a means to enhance his creative output. Notably, Morrison struggled to produce creative writing while under the influence of these substances, indicating that increased consumption of alcohol and drugs ultimately hindered his artistic expression and adversely affected his interpersonal relationships.

This analysis underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the interplay between emotional distress, creativity, and substance use. It challenges the prevailing stereotypes surrounding artists and invites further investigation into the cognitive processes that underpin creative expression during times of mental struggle.

### **Conclusion on the Impact of Substance Use on Creativity and Mental Well-Being**

After analyzing various articles, research studies, and thesis conducted by numerous scholars, it can be concluded that while substance use does impact an individual's mental well-being and creativity, it is incorrect to assert that an individual's creative potential is wholly dependent on the substances they consume. Esteemed writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Dorothy Parker, and Allen Ginsberg, as well as musicians like Jim Morrison, Amy Winehouse, and The Beatles, and painters including Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, and Vincent van Gogh, have all engaged with a variety of addictive substances. However, their creativity flourished in their respective fields irrespective of their substance use.

Creativity does not necessitate intoxication; rather, it is influenced by an individual's will, circumstances, and intrinsic capabilities. Regardless of the effects that substances may have on artistic creation, it is evident that they significantly impact one's overall health. The relationship between substance use and artistic creativity is complex and multifaceted. Many artists have turned to drugs and alcohol, often in search of inspiration or as coping mechanisms. While some have experienced heightened creativity during periods of substance use, contributing to groundbreaking artistic achievements, the long-term consequences are frequently detrimental. These can include personal suffering, strained relationships, and, in some tragic cases, premature death.

## **CONCLUSION**

While the interplay between creativity and substance use warrants further exploration, it is essential to recognize that the true essence of creativity arises from within the individual and is not solely contingent upon external substances.

Substance use may provide temporary alterations in perception or mood, which some artists believe enhances their creative output. However, the evidence suggests that these effects are often fleeting and can be overshadowed by the negative consequences, such as impaired judgment,

diminished health, and a decline in sustained creative productivity. Many artists who struggled with addiction ultimately found that their substance use hindered, rather than helped, their creative endeavors.

In conclusion, while the myth of the "tortured artist" driven by substance use persists, the reality is that creativity thrives on discipline, clarity, and mental well-being. The use of drugs and alcohol, rather than being a source of inspiration, often disrupts the very processes that foster true artistic innovation.

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# LOST SMILES AND SILENT STRUGGLES: EXAMINING TEEN DEPRESSION IN *WHO STOLE BHAIIYA'S SMILE?*

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## ABSTRACT

*Children's literature has always consisted of stories that provided topics and materials to discuss emotions or explore emotional life. With the rapid change of genres, children's literature has now further delved into the field of mental health, taking a slight turn away from all those fantasy stories that ended with 'happily ever after.' Similarly, Author Sanjana Kapur writes about a very serious and sensitive topic in this children's book "Who stole bhaiya's smile?" That is depression. She explores the themes of family dynamics, parental and sibling relationships while the protagonist who is a newly turned adolescent, known as "bhaiya" tries to cope up with his mental health through various methods. Giving children access to read books which talk about the topic of mental health and its causes, could help them to be courageous and discuss about it in future, they can also help those who are affected by this or the ones they love. In this research paper, I have decided to examine the various symptoms of 'teen depression' that the protagonist goes through and what are his experiences while overcoming them, with the help of his family.*

## KEYWORDS

*Depression, adolescent, mental health, symptoms, teen depression, experiences, family.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Defining mental illness and Depression

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) defines it as "a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling or mood, as well as someone's ability to relate to others and function each day. There are multiple, linking causes including genetics, lifestyle, history and environment, all of which can influence whether someone develops a mental health condition."

It's normal for kids to feel sad, act grouchy, or be in a bad mood at times. But when a sad or bad mood lasts for weeks or longer, and when there are other changes in a child's behavior, it might be depression. Depression can drain a child's energy. They might put less effort into school than before. Even doing little tasks can feel like too much effort. Kids may seem tired,



give up easily, or not try. Kids may not sleep well or seem tired even if they get enough sleep. Some may not feel like eating. Others may overeat. Kids don't have as much fun with friends or enjoy playing like before. They may not feel like doing things they used to enjoy.

Books for children that deal with mental health issues

As an individual living in India, I see growing numbers of suicides at increasingly younger ages. Behavior patterns connected to all aspects of health begin at a young age. Perhaps literacy addressing these aspects of health could play a role in developing positive habits and leave a positive impact on individual lives and the population as a whole. More and more graphic novels, picture books, middle grade and young adult novels deal accurately and responsibly with mental health conditions. But the number of books for younger readers that deal with mental health is minuscule compared to the prevalence of mental illness in all of our lives. For anyone, but especially the young, the right book at the right time can help normalize what likely feels shameful and overwhelming. It helps diminish stigma – every story out there does. It can model and encourage a reader to reach out for support.

### **‘Mental Health’ and the ‘stigma’**

One word: STIGMA. The negative attitudes, prejudice, fear and silence that surround the subject. The many aspects of and the different forms these illnesses take are shrouded in misinformation and misunderstanding. Stigma exacerbates suffering tremendously. It leads to isolation, negative and destructive ways of coping, and death. Mental health is still difficult to discuss at best, and in some communities remains taboo. The pandemic has significantly worsened mental illness and suicide statistics. Cultural issues are also at play. For example, in the west, suicides were outlawed in the 2nd century CE by the Christian Church, and eventually harshly punished by medieval European governments (in response to high numbers of them). The need for more books dealing accurately and responsibly with the problem is urgent. In India, people with severe mental illnesses often turn to temples and shrines, not to doctors. Getting treatment for physical problems is naturally a top priority as it incapacitates the person. Since people have limited finances, physical problems are given preference and mental issues take a back seat as its impact is not as visible as physical issues. There is a big stigma around people suffering from any kind of mental health issues. They are often tagged as “lunatics”, “crazy”, “possessed” and many more by society. This leads to a vicious cycle of shame, suffering and isolation of the patients.

### **Portrayal of mental health in the story ‘Who stole Bhaiya’s smile’**

‘Who Stole Bhaiya’s smile’ is a must read for children and their parents to unpack mental health and depression together in a family friendly way. The character ‘chiru’ takes upon a journey to find out the reason behind her ‘bhaiya’, that is her brother has lost his smile suddenly one day. Chiru being a small girl often does not understand why her brother is not happy anymore and tries to help him out with her trying to cheer him up. The author portrays ‘depression’ as a big monster that has engulfed bhaiya from the back and Chiru describes the monster as ‘mean and grumpy.’ She also says that ‘it feels like he’s swallowed up bhaiya’s smile.’ The author has

skillfully depicted the sensitive topic of 'depression' through this children's graphic novel with outstanding pictures showing the need for mental health appreciation in today's times.

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze 'Who stole Bhaiya's smile' which addresses aspects of mental health and lingering effects of Depression. The goal was to examine the symptoms of teen depression that the protagonist of the story goes through while being a person suffering from mental health issues.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **"How children's literature can lessen the stigma around mental illness"**

Lourdes Ubidia in her blog stated that the genre of Mental Health and wellness in children's literature is crucial to creating a society of individuals who can openly discuss mental health issues and show empathy for those who struggle with any kind of mental disorder. She mentioned the book 'The princess and the Fog' by Lloyd Jones which tells the story of a princess who had it all but despite everything, her fog was bringing her down. The fog acts as a metaphor in the story to describe depression to the young readers.

### **"Depression and children's fiction"**

Kit Whitfield in her blog talks about two works from children's literature- 'Harry Potter' by J.K. Rowling and the Nickelodeon series 'Avatar: The last Airbender.' She mentions the representation of 'Dementors' from the Harry Potter series which metaphorically represents depression. Dementors are frightening shrouded monsters that glide around spreading horror in their wake. In the presence of one, you flash back to all the most painful experiences of your life and become convinced you'll never be happy again; in the worst circumstances, it'll suck out your soul and leave you hollow for the rest of your life. She also mentions The Fire Lord dynasty in Avatar: The Last Airbender who are presented as a messed up family with a history of emotional damage that has spread down several generations, worsening as it goes.

### **"SILVER MATILDA - Get to know me: Depression"**

Louise Lightfoot in her book 'Silver Matilda' tells that This book was written with children with depression in mind, providing an opportunity to relate to Matilda's thoughts, feelings, behaviors and experiences. However, children with a range of needs may benefit from the story. The book is written in a narrative style, so it does not use diagnostic labels and is not intended for this purpose. Instead the focus is on creating a common language which children can understand and use to make sense of how they are feeling.

### **"Graphic Novels and Mental Health in the EFL Classroom"**

Myrnes Pal in her thesis talked about how the analysis of the graphic novels looked at a selection of memoirs and fictional stories, namely Fun Home (2007), Anya's Ghost (2011), Through the Woods (2014), Persepolis (2008) and American Born Chinese (2006), and discovered multiple ways that graphic novels can portray various aspects of mental health using the means of its medium. The memoirs can give direct depictions of the struggles that the authors experienced,

while the fictional novels can depict abstract character's experiences, which gives the readers different ways of relating to what is portrayed. Together, this shows that graphic novels can be an engaging way for learners to explore mental health.

### **“Children’s Play and Mental Illness in Children’s Literature and Film”**

Ian Wojcik-Andrews in his research paper says that the rise of children's literature, for example, as a distinct classification of books in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, woven into the fabric of an increasingly affluent middle class, contains within it the histories of children's play and children's mental health. As one of the nineteenth century's preeminent books, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is an appropriate place to begin a more detailed discussion about madness, mental illness, and play. The use of toys in Toy Story to explore themes of mental illness, children's play, and family life echoes a much broader conversation in the 1990s about toys, mental health, and childhood.

## **DISCUSSION**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) *“Depressive disorder (also known as depression) is a common mental disorder. It involves a depressed mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time.”*

Depression is different from regular mood changes and feelings about everyday life. It can affect all aspects of life, including relationships with family, friends and community. It can result from or lead to problems at school and at work.

### **“Dukduk” as the personification of Depression in ‘Who Stole Bhaiya’s Smile’**

Author Sanjana Kapur says that the brain like any other organ can get hurt and may need help to heal. Sometimes we feel sad. We cry, we sulk and we get angry, but the mood passes and then we feel better. But some of us have a sadness that stays for a long time. We don't feel like doing anything and it changes our behavior. In this short graphic novel, Dukduk is given the form of a big monster who is sitting on the back of 'bhaiya' to describe depression. Often, depression is led by anxiety and during anxiety attacks, a person may feel irregular heartbeat or shortness of breath. Depression can cause an increased heart rate due to an increased autonomous heart rate.

Normal heartbeat sounds are often described as 'lub-dub' in English and 'dukduk' in Indian Languages in order to express the sound of the rapid beating of the heart inside the chest. Therefore, the name itself is an allegory in this story. Dukduk is also given the form of a monster as depression can feel like an insatiable force that feeds on fear, stress, and energy. Monster is defined as “one who deviates from normal or acceptable behavior or character” just like how depression is like a tiny monster within that feeds on all of the negative thoughts, feelings, and events in one's life, making him or her to feel unnatural and unusual than normal days.

## Symptoms of Teen Depression in ‘Who Stole Bhaiya’s smile’

*“Teen depression is a serious mental health condition that can affect teens and children at any age. It's characterized by a persistent feeling of sadness or emptiness, and a loss of interest in activities.”*

Often, kids with teen depression will have a noticeable change in their thinking and behavior. The most common symptom of depression is sadness for no apparent reason most of the time. They may have no motivation and even become withdrawn, closing their bedroom door after school and staying in their room for hours.

### Anhedonia:

‘Anhedonia’ is defined as the inability to experience joy or pleasure. One may feel numb or less interested in things that they once enjoyed. It is a common symptom of depression and a primary feature of major depressive disorder. In the graphic novel “Who stole Bhaiya’s smile” the story starts with saying how Chiru and Bhaiya used to play all the time. They would explore caves under the staircase and fight the aliens on the mango tree in the backyard. Bhaiya always made Chiru laugh- “Mangasura is from Mars and she is here to destroy your house Ha! Ha! Aaaah I will trap and gobble up Mangasura. Bahahaha!” Here, this stage describes the pre-deployment anhedonia phase where it is the preparation stage before the final phase of when anhedonia hits. In the next page, we can see that it has been a long time since Chiru and Bhaiya have played together. When Chiru yells at Bhaiya asking why he does not feel like playing anymore, Bhaiya replies that it is because he does not want to. He is stuck with a big ‘monster’ on his back. This describes the final stage of Anhedonia where the person has totally lost interest in things which he used to enjoy previously. Bhaiya’s character was seen to be someone who was ‘happy-go-lucky’ and loved playing with his little sister but later, he is shown as someone who has lost his smile and stopped enjoying the little things in life. When Chiru tries to show a new book to Bhaiya and asks if the pictures are pretty, he simply replies with a “they’re okay.” This shows how numb he has become that nothing lifts up his mood anymore. Another instance is shown when Chiru shows Bhaiya the new train set and he replies one more time with no interest. He simply mutters “hmm, nice” and leaves. Chiru continuously tries to bring her brother’s smile back but she is only met with disappointment. The once ‘Mangasura’ which was Chiru and

Bhaiya’s favorite thing to play is now just nothing but a distant memory. This paints a perfect picture of what depression does to a person. It makes a person full of smiles and laughter lose its happiness and joy.

### Irritability and Agitation

A person with depression may seem to be easily annoyed and irritated by others. The National Institute of Mental Health states that people with depression may express symptoms differently. Instead of sadness, people may seem angry or irritable. Children, Teens and Adolescents are most likely to display depression through anger, irritability and tantrums. The original definition of agitated “unipolar” depression described an affective state in which mood and ideation were in the negative polarity and activity in the opposite polarity. It has also been called “excited depression” or “depression with excitatory symptoms,” pointing out the

presence of symptoms of excitement (i.e., restlessness, talkativeness, flight of ideas, irritability) together with a depressed mood within the same affective episode.

In the story, as Chiru named the ‘monster’ Dukduk, she says that sometimes Dukduk grows bigger than a truck. She says Bhaiya gets angry about everything on those days. He even chews his food angrily. (6)

The author tries to compare Dukduk, which is depression with a truck and says that as days pass by, the monster engulfs the person more and more which eventually leads to unusual behavior. The person gets more irritated by even the smallest of things and gets angry at things that might not even be that big of a deal. He or she gets frustrated with everything that surrounds him or her.

### *Insomnia and Hypersomnia*

Depression disorders are often accompanied by sleep troubles. People with depression may find it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep during the night or experience periods of excessive daytime sleepiness. Sleep psychologist Michelle Drerup, PsyD, DBSM, says that while insomnia is more likely to be associated with depression than oversleeping, it's still possible that sleeping too much is a sign that something is amiss. While oversleeping can be a symptom of atypical depression, there are different factors that also contribute to it. “When someone is depressed, it

can be because they sleep as a form of escape” is what one may think.

Insomnia is trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. It can interfere with or impair the way you function during the day. Insomnia is often a characteristic of depression and other mental health disorders. With insomnia, you may sleep too little, have difficulty falling asleep, awaken frequently throughout the night, or be unable to get back to sleep.

In the story, Chiru describes Dukduk as someone who seems to be holding on to Bhaiya. He does not even let Bhaiya get out of the bed. (8) The author describes each symptom to occur on different days in Bhaiya's life. Each day comes with new symptoms to deal with. On the third day, Bhaiya is seen to be ‘glued to bed’ which shows how depression can make someone feel lethargic and can cause sleep problems. We can assume that Bhaiya is either oversleeping or cannot sleep at all which makes him feel restless to move out of the bed. Insomnia or

Hypersomnia can cause one to feel lazy about his every day chores and not motivated enough to start a new day.

### *Fatigue as a residual symptom*

Fatigue is one of the identified symptoms of depression listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) criteria where it is defined as physical fatigue or loss of energy. People with depression often feel very tired and don't want to take part in any activities. One of the most common residual symptoms of a partially

resolved depression is fatigue. Broadly defined, symptoms of fatigue can affect physical, cognitive, and emotional function, impair school and work performance, disturb social and family relationships. The physical symptoms of fatigue include reduced activity, low energy, tiredness, decreased physical endurance, increased effort to do physical tasks, general weakness, heaviness, slowness or

sluggishness. The emotional (affective) symptoms of fatigue include decreased motivation or initiative (apathy), decreased interest, feeling overwhelmed, feeling bored, aversion to effort, and feeling low.

In “Who stole Bhaiya’s smile” Chiru mentions that there are days when Dukduk is small and floats around like a kite, which makes Bhaiya get out of bed and play with her but he gets tired very fast. This fits the physical symptoms of fatigue mentioned in the above lines. As Bhaiya

comes back to his own self for a few hours, he is quickly taken back to the cave by his monster which makes him tired and out of breath. The emotional symptoms of fatigue are also explored when Chiru shows the cake she baked for her Bhaiya on his birthday but he only replies with a mundane expression and says ‘Thank you Chiru.’ Chiru understands that Bhaiya’s smile is ‘very different’ these days. It shows how empty one starts to feel when depression hits because even their special day could feel like just one of those boring days in a year and one gets tired of life so much that he or she has no hopes of smiling with joy anymore.

### Hopelessness theory of depression

The hopelessness theory of depression, mainly contributed by Martin Seligman, theorizes that the cause of depression is due to a belief that one has no control over the outcomes of their life, leaving them hopeless. It posits that “depression is caused by a sense of helplessness that results from repeated exposure to uncontrollable and aversive environmental stimuli.” The theory

suggests that people who experience these stimuli may eventually come to believe that the situation is inescapable.

The character of Bhaiya is seen to be someone who goes through the hopelessness depression theory. At first, he tries to convince himself that this feeling is just all in his head and he just has to put his mind to it and he will eventually snap out of it. He tells himself that it is not easy but he will try. But later as the story progresses, we can see that Bhaiya has lost his hope. When Chiru asks Bhaiya if his ‘new friend’, which is Dukduk, is making him unhappy, he nods. He

tells Chiru that he feels like being happy but it is hard work on most days. When Chiru further asks about how long Dukduk is going to stay with him, he replies ‘I don’t know.’ This shows

how Bhaiya has no hope or confidence of getting better as he says he doesn't know when he will feel like himself again or when he will get his smile back. Dukduk is like the friend who is playing hide and seek with Bhaiya but this time, to him, the situation has no exit door and is inescapable.

### **Mental Illness stigma among the family**

In the context of mental illness, stigma of mental illness can create social distance or rejection in the form of decrease in opportunity for employment (discrimination), resulting from negative labels (stereotype) placed on people with mental illness (e.g., unstable, dangerous, and unpredictable), and fear of them (prejudice). The stigma of depression is different from that of other mental illnesses and largely due to the negative nature of the illness that makes depression seem unattractive and unreliable.

Similarly, in the story as well, Bhaiya is faced with different stigmas that are put forward by his family members. Chiru narrates how their mother thinks that she knows how to make Bhaiya feel better. And when Mama finally decides to help Bhaiya, she says “you should go out for a walk.

The fresh air will do you good.” This shows the stigma and stereotypical belief that surrounds sensitive topics like mental health. Here, the mother thinks that Bhaiya is just going through this ‘disease’ because he has been staying inside home a lot more than usual, ignoring the fact that this is one of the most prominent symptoms of teenage depression. A teen feels like shutting himself off from the outside world because the world does not seem so beautiful anymore to him. Next, we can see that Papa keeps on asking Bhaiya to fix his mood and says “eat well and your problem will go away.” Another instance where the symptoms of depression is shown by the protagonist but is again discarded as just a casual matter of fact. Later we can even see that Chiru says their Nani and Nana as well ignores Bhaiya’s feelings and words as they tell him “Arre, you kids and your problems. In my day we were tougher. You are just too distracted.” Here, the word ‘tougher’ is ironic as it could mean that a person suffering from mental health issues is

automatically seen as somebody who is ‘weak’, when fighting against mental illness is one of the toughest things one can do.

### **CONCLUSION**

Who Stole Bhaiya's Smile is a must-read for children and their parents to unpack mental health and depression together in a family-friendly way. Chiru exhibits compassion for his brother Bhaiya, who has lost his smile. He demonstrates concern for Bhaiya's welfare and makes efforts to make Bhaiya smile once more. The story ends with Bhaiya getting help from Doctor Aunty and Chiru being a ray of hope for Bhaiya to overcome his monster. It is seen that in the end, Dukduk, that is depression is still there and sometimes it is big but

sometimes it is small and slowly Bhaiya is getting his smile back. Even if no one in the family takes bhaiya seriously, Chiru is the only one who motivates Bhaiya to get his laughter back.

Through close reading of the text and the current study had analyzed the symptoms of teen depression that the protagonist might have experienced as well. Five major symptoms that are found in a teen when he or she is experiencing depression and used them to examine the character of Bhaiya and also the family stigma that surrounds the topic of mental health in order to understand Bhaiya's journey to overcome his challenge have also been included in the study.

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# **SPECTACLES OF CONTAGION: MORBID CURIOSITY AND PANDEMIC FILMS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*During the COVID-19 pandemic, medical thrillers like Contagion (2011), The Flu (2013), and Virus (2019) surged in popularity alongside other apocalyptic and pandemic-related genres. This fascination can be partly explained by the psychological trait of morbid curiosity, which draws audiences to the darker aspects of human experience, especially during crises. These films resonate deeply with the anxieties of their time, offering a space for viewers to confront and process fears associated with contagion and societal breakdown. The aim of this paper is to analyse how the visual representation of pandemics in medical thrillers provides a narrative framework for audiences to address pandemic-related issues. Further, it explores how such films engage spectatorial imagination, fostering psychological preparedness and influencing viewers' perceptions and responses to real-world health crises.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Medical thrillers, Pandemic, Morbid curiosity, Visual representation, Spectatorial imagination, Preparedness, Contagion, The Flu, Virus.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Before COVID-19 emerged, movies primarily served as a means of entertainment. Audiences would gather in theatres and use streaming platforms to escape their daily lives, immersing themselves in various genres, from romantic comedies to thrilling action films. However, the global pandemic greatly changed this environment, altering both the manner and reasons people consumed films. During this time, certain genres surged in popularity, notably medical thrillers, zombie movies, and horror films. The increase in the interest for these categories reflected a deeper psychological and social need during a period filled with uncertainty and fear.

For example, the film Contagion (2011) experienced an extraordinary spike in viewership, rising from the 270<sup>th</sup> most-watched Warner Bros. Film to the second-most-watched film of 2020 (Mack 2020). This trend was not unique to that film; other pandemic-focused movies, like Outbreak (1995), The Flu (2013), and Virus (2019), also saw substantial increases

in popularity during the pandemic. As people remained indoors and faced real health crises, these films provided a peculiar mix of familiarity and escapism. This leads us to question what fuelled this intense interest in such genres when everything seemed to be in jeopardy.

One of the key factor contributing to the growing fascination with pandemic films is a psychological phenomenon termed morbid curiosity. This refers to the interest in disturbing and unsettling topics related to horror, violence, death, and especially pandemics. Unlike simple enjoyment, morbid curiosity reveals a deeper intrigue; individuals are drawn to these stories to gain a better understanding of the frightening aspects of life and mortality. Scientific research supports this idea, showing that horror enthusiasts and those with high morbid curiosity often display greater resilience in times of crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic (Scrivner 01). These films can offer valuable insights into catastrophic scenarios that may apply to actual pandemics. In other words, such a fascination and motivation is a characteristic for a group of fans of the so – called “prepper” genres: apocalyptic, alien – invasion, zombie films (Pisarek 236). Although the fictional portrayals may not always accurately reflect reality, viewers can derive lessons and coping strategies relevant to their own experiences.

Alongside morbid curiosity, the rise of pandemic films can also be linked to their ability to resonate with current anxieties. As society dealt with fears surrounding contagion and societal collapse, these films provided a channel for audiences to confront and process their anxieties. The narratives frequently reflected the chaotic environment of the real world, enabling viewers to engage with their own worries in a secure and organized setting. By observing characters face similar challenges, audiences could reflect on their own situations, promoting a sense of connection and understanding. What’s more, these films often function as cautionary tales, emphasizing the fragility of societal frameworks and the possible repercussions of inaction in a health crisis. As viewers watch the characters wrestling with outbreaks, misinformation and panic, they are encouraged to reflect on their own reactions to real-life situations. This interaction with the narrative not only nurtures empathy but also prompts viewers to think critically about public health practices and the importance of community resilience.

This paper intends to examine how the visual portrayal of pandemics in medical thrillers establishes a narrative framework that enables viewers to address pandemic-related concerns. It aims to analyse how films like *Contagion*, *The Flu*, and *Virus* have the potential to enhance psychological readiness, influencing how audiences perceive and react to actual health crises.

Through the lens of medical thrillers and pandemic films, audiences acquire tools to process their fears and prepare for the unpredictable nature of the world around them. By exploring the factors driving the popularity of pandemic films, we can gain insights into the broader societal ramifications of film consumption during crises.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Pandemic Practice: Horror fans and Morbidly Curious Individuals are more Psychologically Resilient during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Coltan Scrivner et al., in their study, found that fans of film and prepper genres experienced less psychological distress during COVID-19. The morbid curiosity trait in these individuals helped them develop strategies to cope with fear and calmly handle fear-eliciting situations in real life. It is also evident that such audiences exhibit both greater resilience and preparedness. Morbidly curious individuals are associated with positive resilience and an interest in pandemic films during the pandemic.

### **An Infectious Curiosity: Morbid Curiosity and Media Preferences during a Pandemic**

Coltan Scrivner illustrates how viral pandemic movies such as *Contagion* and *Outbreak* present information about infection, gathering supplies, and how people will (or will not) work during a pandemic. He also found that during COVID-19, the rates of morbidly curious individuals are higher, and it also encourages individuals to learn about the dangerous and disgusting aspects of a threat.

### **The Cinematic Landscape of ‘Virus’ – Visuals, Health, and History**

Dr. Sebastian Joseph, in his article, speaks about how a film can be used to study the morbid curiosity in viewers. He says that this film makes its audience familiar with certain medical terms and about the safety measures that should be carried out during a pandemic.

### **Contagion (2011) as a Prediction of a Global Pandemic of COVID-19**

Sanaa Saeed Merza, in her 2021 research paper, states that the movie *Contagion* garnered millions of views because it predicts and emulates the potential situation during a global pandemic like that of the events of COVID-19. Moreover, she says that the film encourages its viewers to apply what they learn from it in real life, which can help them prevent a pandemic.

## **Cinema and the COVID-19: When Fiction meets Reality in Steven Soderbergh's movie 'Contagion'**

This 2022 research paper implores that the movie serves as a warning for all people to prepare themselves. It provides a realistic vision that can convince viewers and presents a scenario that parallels the COVID-19 situation.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Morbid Curiosity and Medical Thrillers**

Morbid curiosity is essentially an interest in information that most people would avoid due to its association with darker sides of life and death. This includes understanding the motivations of dangerous individuals (like those featured in true crimes), bodily violations (such as infections and diseases), violent acts (like murder videos), and even perceived dangers from supernatural elements (such as curses or spirits). This attraction to unsettling aspects of life can be analysed through Freudian concepts of the unconscious and repression. According to Freud, forgotten memories, uncanny emotions and feelings, are all repressed in the subconscious mind, which cannot enter the consciousness- since it can lead to opposition and psychic pain. Freud states that "... in the unconscious the suppressed wish still exists, only waiting for its chance to become active..." (Freud 2214). It is a normal part of human development and repressed desires can be expressed through dreams, literature, jokes and 'Freudian slips' (Felluga 2011). During crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, audiences are often drawn to themes that helps them to confront their fears about mortality, societal collapse, and contagion. This fascination is rooted in the unconscious mind, where repressed desires surface as an interest in horror, apocalyptic, and medical thrillers. Rather than entirely steering away from these uncomfortable subjects, morbid curiosity encourages a desire to investigate them further (Scrivner 02). Hence, it can often drive audiences to engage with medical thrillers like *Contagion*, *The Flu*, and *Virus*.

*Contagion* is a 2011 American medical thriller film directed by Steven Soderbergh. It is about the rapid progression of a highly contagious virus that kills patients within days. As the epidemic unfolds, medical researchers and public health officials work to contain the disease, develop a vaccine to halt its spread and quell the panic that spreads as fast as the virus itself. The film highlights the factors that shape the emergence of a pandemic, the limits and consequences of public health responses and how interpersonal connections can play a role in the spread of a disease (Blakely 05). *The Flu* is a 2013 South Korean medical thriller film

written and directed by Kim Sung-su, about an outbreak of a deadly strain of H5N1 that kills its victims within 36 hours, devastating the Bundang district in Seongnam, which has a population of nearly half a million people. While *Virus* is a 2019 Malayalam film about Kerala's Nipah virus outbreak, a virus that is zoonotic (transmitted from animals to humans), directed by Aashiq Abu and written by Mubsin Parari, Sharfu, and Suhas. Unlike the other two movies, this one is a re-telling of the 2018 Nipah outbreak in Kerala. The film explores the collective paranoia created by the virus and how it disrupts the life of individuals.

Audiences are drawn to these genres, as they can identify and connect with the characters' behaviour and experiences. According to Sigmund Freud, 'identification is the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person' (Quinodoz 198). This psycho-analytical concept explains how audiences relate to the characters in the films. They use these narratives to address their own fears and traumas, while identifying with characters facing the on-screen crisis. Moreover, this fascination serves as a coping mechanism, allowing the viewers to engage with their fears in real time. Such movies can be seen as cautionary tales, rather than as entertainment. Hence, "cinema is an effective art form to reflect our understanding of the complexity of pandemics' unfolding process, as well as their impact and social coping efforts" (Song 24).

### **How these Films Foster Spectatorial Imagination?**

These movies foster spectatorial imagination through their realistic portrayal of viral outbreaks and societal responses to them. According to Zhaoli Song and Alessandro Fergnani, "pandemic films depict people's emotional responses such as fear and panic, towards infectious diseases; as well as the social unrests against containment strategies such as curfew and quarantine" (24). The movie *Contagion* is acclaimed for its accurate depiction of how a deadly virus is transmitted throughout the world, and how it affects individuals in a movie, like the COVID- 19 outbreak, which makes easier for the audience to accept it and often blurs the boundary between reality and fiction. The South Korean film, *The Flu* portrays a world where pandemic can create anarchy. It depicts the extreme conditions that pandemics can create, which in turn warns the audiences to prevent such a situation. The South Indian Malayalam movie, *Virus* is based on a true story. Compared to the other two fictional movies, this film offers a blueprint on how to effectively stop a transmissible pandemic.

## Psychological Preparedness

Pandemic films have heightened public awareness of the risk of pandemics, demystified their causes by expelling superstitious beliefs; and served as roadmap to understand and cope with them. (Lindahl 2020). These can help the public to understand how to fight against such ‘invisible enemies’ and foster pandemic preparedness and prevent societal breakdown.

These movies delve into the fear about contagion and loss. This engagement motivates people to think about their experiences with illnesses and breakdown. Moreover, they also employ accurate scientific terminologies and expert inputs, which enhances credibility. In the film *Contagion*, we can see Dr. Erin Mears (played by Kate Winslet) explaining about R- Nought to uninformed officials. The scene goes like this “For every person who gets sick, how many other people are they likely to infect? So, for seasonal flu, that’s usually about one. Smallpox, on the other hand, it’s over three. Now, before we had a vaccine, polio spread at a rate between four and six. Now, we call that number, the R – Nought.” Similarly, many other medical terms like index patient, social distancing, quarantine, lockdown, swap test, deep burial, and so on can be seen in these three movies, which are comprehensible but also incomprehensible to the spectators.

Moreover, these movies serve as educational tools amidst COVID- 19. Take the case of the Malayalam movie *Virus*, the events that took place during the outbreak in Kerala is portrayed with precision, how the state leaders, government officials, and medical professionals, worked tirelessly day and night to treat those were infected, identify and quarantine individuals who had exposure and investigate their link to the index patient Zakariya (played by Zakariya Mohammed). Dr. Annu (played by Parvathy Thiruvothu), a second – year PG student of Community Medicine, played a crucial role in finding the link of other patients with Zakariya, even though she was not assigned to do so. This shows how doctors work throughout an outbreak, endangering their own lives.

The movies *Contagion* and *The Flu* serve as examples of what should not be done during a pandemic. In the 2013 South Korean movie, giant claw machines lift masses of bodies covered in plastic bags for burning, regardless of whether they are alive. They lied the infected persons that they are shifted to another ward for treatment while in truth, they are moved for slaughter. The army officials and soldiers are willing to shoot down affected people in the name of mitigating the virus transmission which shows their inhumanity. Whereas in the movie *Contagion*, sheds light on the fact that a virus has zoonotic origin, it is initially passed onto the

people through unsanitary restaurant as it appears at the end of the film when a piece of banana is fallen from a wrong bat to be picked up by a wrong pig (Merza 11). Like the other two movies, *Contagion* provides information how the index patient gets infected. Here, Beth Emhoff (played by Gwyneth Paltrow) becomes the index patient when the chef who cleaned the infected pig, shares a handshake with her, without washing hands. This scene explains the importance of washing hands to the audience.

*Contagion* also portrays the anxiety of people during a pandemic. The scenes of empty shops, people fighting for food, committing thefts etc., shows how the public should not behave during an outbreak. Moreover, in the movie, on day 26, when the volunteers supplying rations for the people informed them that it is finished and requested to leave the park calmly, they began to behave in an animalistic manner, fighting for them. This is not a fictional scene, since it is possible for people to behave like that during a disaster or pandemic. In such a situation, we need to behave like Mitch Emhoff (played by Matt Damon), who fights for an unknown lady whose ration is getting stolen by others. Rather than being used a medium for education or as cautionary tales, such movies have the potential to influence public perceptions and shape their behaviour.

## CONCLUSION

The COVID – 19 pandemic has led to the resurgence of pandemic films which shows the connection between cinema and reality. Such films showcase our societal fears and capability to cope with stress and challenges during an epidemic. Movies like *Contagion*, *The Flu*, and *Virus* seized audience attraction not just as forms of entertainment but as stories which helps its viewers to understand the complexities of pandemics, irresponsible public responses, and chaos in society. The allure of morbid curiosity—our innate fascination with darker themes—drew viewers in, allowing them to confront their fears within a controlled space.

These films offer vivid images of outbreaks and societal responses, which sparked imagination and helped us to correlate with our own experiences during COVID – 19. They served as cautionary tales and provided insights on how to behave in such unprecedented situations and showed the importance of community resilience in uncertain times. Beyond as entertainment sources, these narratives provide important lessons in healthcare and cautions us to be prepared for the unexpected. Moreover, these films help us to navigate the psychological distress caused by pandemics. They show how fear and chaos can shape our actions and emotions. As the

characters face same challenges, the audience can find comfort and familiarity with them and provide courage to face such scenarios.

Ultimately, the popularity of pandemic films speaks the profound impact of storytelling during a crisis. They not only address collective fears but also shape public perceptions and inspires audiences to be prepared for such unexpected situations. Such movies can serve as a warning but also as give information on how to effectively prevent a pandemic. Through this paper, we can uncover the unique power of cinema as a tool for reflection, education, and emotional relief, especially during a pandemic.

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**POWER, MEMORY AND OTHERNESS: A STUDY OF ANAND NEELAKANTAN'S  
ASURA: A TALE OF THE VANQUISHED**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Literature is embodied with the ability to legitimize or contest the status quo, be it historical or fictional. Using symbol, myth and rhetoric, mythological narratives have influenced and shaped cultural practices and determined cultural stereotypes over the centuries. Revisionary writers are occupied with reading traditional narratives from a new perspective, in order to better understand their hidden ideologies. One stellar example of such revisionist writing is Anand Neelakantan's Asura: A Tale of the Vanquished which is a re-visioning of the Sanskrit epic 'Ramayana' from the perspective of the defeated Asura clan. Through the eyes of two first-person narrators – Raavana and the common-born Asura, Bhadra – Neelakantan pens a rich tale of power and memory, of the Asura Empire. This paper explores this epic retelling of the Ramayana, through the lens of Power, Memory and Otherness, and analyze how Neelakantan has changed the perspectives of the ancient epic, opening up more layers that are in-tune with postmodernist society.*

**KEYWORDS**

*Revisionism, narrative, postmodernism, power, memory, Self, Other*

**INTRODUCTION**

Published in 2012, Anand Neelakantan weaves a magical tale despite *Asura* not having any mystical elements like gods and goddesses. Asuras and Devas are depicted as two different clans of people co-habiting ancient Bharat. The Asura Empire had once occupied almost the entire subcontinent. However, Deva raiders from the north, led by their crafty chieftain, Indra, manage to destroy the Asura kingdom, exploiting the Asura's lack of a strong powerful leader who can execute unquestioned decisions. Slowly, the might of the Asuras vanish into myth, and the deva kingdoms grow in power, alongside the growth of rigid casteism. The Asuras are marginalized, and their erstwhile kings hide in forests and engage in petty raids with bandits while reminiscing on the lost glory of their people.

Ravana is born in abject poverty, the son of a brahmin and the ruler of Lanka, and an Asura woman. His father abdicates his throne to his brother, Kubera, leaving his four children and wife to struggle in poverty. Ravana dreams of conquering the world and becoming the most glorious king of all the Asura kings, and restoring the might of the Asura Empire. He embarks on his conquest with his brother Kumbhakarna and Vibheeshana, and is trained by the once-powerful Asura king, Mahabali. He advises Ravana to shun the nine base emotions of anger, pride, jealousy, happiness, sadness, fear, selfishness, passion and ambition, and to embrace the intellect which according to traditional Indian wisdom, is supreme. However, Ravana denies

this. He says, “I shall live like a man and die as one. I will never try to be a God...I will live to its full...I shall be a man with ten faces – I am Dasamukha” (Neelakantan 45)

Ravana amasses a rag-tag army but his dream of conquering Lanka remains unachieved until his meeting with the common-born Asura, Bhadra. Bhadra was once leading a simple life of a farmer with his wife and 3-year-old daughter when it was all brutally taken away from him in a raid by invading Deva army. Having lost everything, Bhadra swears revenge against the devas, and sees in Ravana the saviour of the Asura clan, especially for people like him. “I know you are our saviour. You are our God-sent king who has come to rescue the Asura tribe from the clutches of the Devas” (Neelakantan 69). With Bhadra’s help, Ravana is able to conquer Lanka, and is crowned the emperor.

Despite this, the relationship between Ravana and Bhadra is depicted as strange, and not very cordial. Ravana is equally fascinated by, and afraid of, Bhadra because he sees in the common Asura someone beyond his control, someone whose motives remain obscure to him. “I waited for his eyes to fall, for him to cower and stare at his own toes. But the man before me showed no nervousness...There was something crude, raw and fresh about the man. He was the original force of nature, the very salt of the earth. The fact that he was an ordinary man made him extraordinary” (Neelakantan 69). For Bhadra, he slowly becomes disillusioned in his belief that Ravana will be the saviour of the Asuras; instead, he comes to realise that he seems to care only for the higher-born Asuras – the ones in positions of power. “I was but a small pawn in his game...My king had already forgotten me” (Neelakantan 131). But despite this mutual antipathy, Ravana and Bhadra continue to help each other however begrudgingly, because they realise that each needs the other for survival.

In the end, when Ravana lies on the final battlefield, defeated and near death, it is Bhadra who comes and vows revenge in his name. It is finally the acts of Bhadra that serve to break King Rama, forcing him to send his pregnant wife, Sita to the forest. After her death, Rama becomes withdrawn and depressed, and his kingdom comes under the control of caucous priests. However, Bhadra too, knows no peace. Years later, when he finally returns to the land of his birth, he is chased away by the people who have now become very rigid in their belief in the superiority of the brahmins, and the inferiority of the Asuras. The novel ends with Bhadra eking out a living in the forest, isolated from other people and waiting for death to claim him. He has long since given up his quest for finding meaning in life but despite everything, he finds a small bubble of hope rising in his heart of being reborn into a world where all men are equal, and there is perpetual peace, and no fraud or disaster in the land.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sandip Ghorpade and Sampada Madje explores the deconstruction of grand myths in Neelakantan's novel *Asura*, in their study *Deconstructing the Grand Myth: A Study of Anand Neelakantan's Asura: A Tale of the Vanquished*. They examine the characterization of the traditional hero Lord Ram, and the conventional villain Ravana, against the backdrop of marginalization and silencing of the vanquished people.

Monica Mendez studies Neelakantan's *Asura* from the settler colonial perspective while tracing the metamorphosis of a liberal society to one that is patriarchal and rigid in caste system

in her paper *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished as a Form of Revisionist Literature: A Settler Colonial Perspective*. She studies how the silences of the traditional narrative of the Ramayana alludes to a colonial mindset by portraying the Asuras and other indigenous people as the victims of the 'heroic' Devas who destroyed their culture and portrayed them as demons. It shows a clash between two people and the violent genesis of present Indian society through their eventual amalgamation.

Wongchalard's study, *Revisiting Ramayana through Oppositional Telling of Anand Neelakantan's Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*, is a nod to the multiple versions of Ramayana that are present in the oral traditions of India. It is also the basis of Neelakantan's novel which is analyzed through the lens of Subaltern Studies. The study reveals that Rama's goodness is in question as it merely reflects a Brahminical worldview that actually stands in contrast with those of the Asuras and other non-Brahmin-Hindu believers. Oppositional narratives of the original storyline make the epic even more intriguing as it caters to the 'other voices', who have alternative opinions of Rama and who happen to perceive the epic from differing ideological positions that are in contrast to the original version. Using such narratives, this paper attempts to represent the identity of the Asuras, the 'other' in Indian mythology.

Swikruti Mohapatra does a comparative analysis of Valmiki's Ravana and Neelakantan's Ravana in her study *Revisiting Ramayana: A Comparative Study of Valmiki's 'Ramayana' and Anand Neelakantan's 'Asura': Tale of the Vanquished*. In Ramayana, there were only narratives of Ravana being a demon, being a cruel king and being a culprit but in Asurayana, another side of Ravana has been presented. Anand Neelakantan, an Indian mythological writer was inspired by the history and mythology of the temples and surroundings of his village, and undertook to rewriting mythological stories through the perspectives of the 'negative' characters.

Aswathy S Nair constructs a review of Neelakantan's retelling of the Sanskrit epic Ramayana in her paper *The Tale of the Victor to the Tale of the Vanquished*. *Asura* explores the life of Ravana, the supreme antihero in Ramayana. It is the tale of the vanquished while Ramayana is the tale of the victor- Rama. Anand Neelakantan justifies the actions of his protagonist and provides the reader an alternative perspective for the epic. This portrayal enables us to analyze the viewpoints of the subverted characters in the myth/epic. Moreover, the author consciously constructs a fictional world that lies within this physical world. No superhuman or godly powers are attributed to the characters. Every one becomes instrumental to fate and acts accordingly to their role. *Asura* is the tale of Ravana and his people which questions the authenticity of the heroes and the God-like figures in the traditional epic.

Geethu Lekshmi focuses on the portrayal of Sita as the daughter of Ravana in her study *Ravanayana: Negotiating the Political and Cultural Discourse of the Vanquished in Anand Neelakantan's Asura Tale of the Vanquished: The Story of Ravana and His People*. She examines the cultural and political implications of this father-daughter relationship as depicted in Neelakantan's *Asura*. The paper explores Ravana as a subaltern as well as the dual identity of the subaltern, and reassesses native cultural identity. The purpose of the paper is to analyze the complexities of Ravana's political and cultural identity, and to initiate a new discourse on the subaltern by raising the issues of the dual identities of Ravana.

Pushpendra Singh undertakes to analyze the narrative techniques used by Neelakantan in *Asura* in his paper *Study of Narratives in Anand Neelakantan's Novel Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*. The presence of dual narrators, both from the first-person perspective - one, a highborn nobleman from the Asura tribe, and the other, a lowly asura farmer - renders a poignant unveiling of class conflict, racial bias and othering. As Neelakantan points out, "the victor always become the hero". Perhaps this is what inspired the author to focus on the vanquished, not only in *Asura*, but in his other fictional revisionist works as well.

Preethi G compiles a review article based on Neelakantan's *Asura*, *Identity Crisis in Anand Neelakantan's Asura: Tale of the Vanquished*. She focuses on a comparative analysis of Neelakantan's *Asura* with traditional depictions of this mythic anti-hero. She analyses Ravana's journey from poverty to the greatest emperor of Asuras as a quest for identity. Paralleling Ravana's journey is that of the civilian Bhadra, in his quest for vengeance and purpose of life.

## DISCUSSION

In the words of Richard Gruisin, literature utilizes symbol, myth and rhetoric to influence social ideologies (Gruisin 404). The symbols of power, memory and Otherness as seen in *Asura: A Tale of the Vanquished* indicate a paradigm shift in the traditional narratives of the Sanskrit epic, *Ramayana*, of which it is a re-visioned narrative.

### Power

At first glance, the most powerful figures in *Ramayana* seem to be Ravana and Rama, the two kings who fight for dominance, one representing evil and the other good. However, *Asura* sheds a different light on power. By shifting the narrative from the perspective of the vanquished Asuras, it humanizes the traditionally vilified antagonist, Ravana but also critiques the prevailing socio-political paradigms upheld in the classical retellings. In *Asura*, Neelakantan paints Ravana not as an evil tyrant but as a complex, ambitious leader striving to create an equitable society. This perspective shift invites readers to question the moral absolutism often associated with traditional heroism. According to Neelakantan, Ravana is depicted as "a passionate and visionary leader, undone by his flaws yet committed to his people" (Neelakantan 45). This portrayal destabilizes the conventional binary of good versus evil, suggesting that power and righteousness are far more nuanced.

Scholars have noted that Neelakantan's work aligns with a broader trend in contemporary literature that seeks to "give voice to the historically marginalized and subaltern figures" (Sundararajan 123). By foregrounding Ravana's narrative, Neelakantan not only rehabilitates his character but also critiques the victor's monopoly over history and moral judgment. As Reddy observes, "Neelakantan's Ravana embodies a counter-narrative that exposes the inherent biases in hegemonic cultural myths" (Reddy 78).

Furthermore, the novel's focus on the Asuras' struggles against the Devas highlights systemic inequalities and the cyclical nature of power dynamics. Ravana's empire, despite its flaws, is portrayed as striving for inclusivity and justice, in stark contrast to the elitist and often hypocritical practices of Rama's kingdom. This ideological clash underscores the novel's

central thesis: that history is often written by the victors, and power structures are maintained through selective narratives. “Rama may become God and Ravana the demon, for one was putty in the hands of the priests and the other as obstinate as a rock, self-willed and unorthodox. The Ravana of the world are dangerous to those who wish to use the scriptures for their own purpose and lord over others, exploiting everyone. The Ramas of the world is used by the oppressors, as models to justify their way of life” (Neelakantan 498).

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, power implies sovereignty over existence, over nature as well as other human beings (2). In this perspective, the most powerful people in *Asura* are not the kings but the kingmakers, or the brahmin priests. In the name of casteism, innumerable gods and obscure religious texts, the brahmins maintained control over everyone, even kings. Ravana and Rama became “actors in a grand farce, and it is only the small detail of who won, that decided the hero and the villain” (Neelakantan 498). In the name of dharma, brahmin priests ordered King Rama to kill an innocent child of low caste because he had dared to spout a few words in Sanskrit, a language forbidden for everyone but brahmins. When his helpless mother asks Rama “if dharma is afraid of a few Sanskrit words uttered by a child...what sort of dharma you are protecting and whose hands hold the strings that control you”, Rama stood speechless. It is in the name of this same dharma that he was forced to abandon his pregnant wife and order the execution of his beloved brother.

## Memory

Anand Neelakantan's novel *Asura: A Tale of the Vanquished* leverages the power of memory to subvert and redefine traditional paradigms embedded in the epic Ramayana. By recounting the tale from both Ravana's and Bhadra's perspectives, Neelakantan invites readers to reconsider the cultural memory that has long shaped perceptions of good and evil, heroism and villainy.

Memory, as depicted in *Asura*, serves as a potent tool for reclaiming marginalized voices and reconstructing historical narratives. Neelakantan's Ravana is not a mere antagonist; he is a complex character whose memories and experiences provide a counternarrative to the dominant portrayal of Rama as the infallible hero. As Neelakantan writes, “History is written by the victors, but it is the vanquished who remember the true story” (Neelakantan 12). This assertion underscores the novel's aim to challenge the monolithic interpretation of the Ramayana by illuminating the forgotten or suppressed memories of the Asuras.

Complementing Ravana's narrative is Bhadra, a common-born Asura whose perspective provides a stark counterpoint to the high-born Ravana. Bhadra's memories offer insights into the everyday struggles and aspirations of the lower strata of Asura society, further enriching the narrative tapestry. Bhadra's reflections often highlight the disparities and disillusionments faced by commoners, contrasting with Ravana's grandiose ambitions and ideals. This dual narrative structure, as Sundararajan notes, “serves to democratize the act of remembering, allowing for a multiplicity of voices and experiences to coexist within the same historical framework” (Sundararajan 129).

Scholars have observed that Neelakantan's work contributes to a broader literary movement that seeks to "rescue subaltern memories from the erasures of mainstream historiography" (Sundararajan 126). By embedding Ravana's and Bhadra's personal recollections within the larger narrative, Neelakantan disrupts the traditional dichotomy of good versus evil and questions the ethical and moral foundations of the established myth. This approach aligns with the idea that memory is not just a passive recollection of events but an active process of meaning-making that shapes identity and power structures.

Moreover, the novel uses memory to highlight the subjective nature of truth. Ravana's memories reveal his struggles, aspirations, and failures, painting a more humane and relatable figure, while Bhadra's memories expose the harsh realities of life for the common Asura. As Reddy notes, "Neelakantan's narrative strategy of utilizing personal memory serves to humanize Ravana and democratize the narrative through Bhadra's voice, thereby challenging the dehumanizing tendencies of conventional mythological retellings" (Reddy 82).

### **Otherness**

Neelakantan's portrayal of Ravana as an "Other" serves to humanize the demon king, presenting him as a multifaceted leader striving for justice and equity. This perspective starkly contrasts with the traditional Ramayana, where Ravana is unequivocally depicted as the embodiment of evil. As Neelakantan writes, "The Asuras are the dark underbelly of a society that celebrates the victory of the righteous" (Neelakantan 34). By highlighting the Asuras' plight, Neelakantan questions the moral absolutism often associated with the Devas' triumph.

Scholars have noted that the novel's focus on Otherness aligns with postcolonial literary strategies that seek to "give voice to the silenced and marginalized" (Sundararajan 130). Neelakantan's narrative strategy underscores the inherent biases in cultural myths, suggesting that the construction of the Other is a deliberate act to sustain the hegemony of the victorious. This theme is further explored through Bhadra, a common-born Asura whose experiences reflect the everyday struggles and resilience of the oppressed. Bhadra's perspective provides a stark counterpoint to Ravana's high-born narrative, emphasizing the diversity within the Asura community itself.

Furthermore, the novel uses the concept of Otherness to critique the socio-political structures of the time. As Reddy observes, "Neelakantan's reimagining of the Ramayana through the eyes of the Asuras challenges the binary of good versus evil, presenting a more nuanced understanding of power and morality" (Reddy 85). This redefinition encourages readers to empathize with the traditionally vilified and to reconsider the historical narratives they have accepted.

### **CONCLUSION**

Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: A Tale of the Vanquished* serves as a transformative text that employs the themes of power, memory, and Otherness to challenge and redefine the

traditional paradigms of the Ramayana. By offering a narrative from the perspective of the marginalized Asuras, Neelakantan not only rehumanizes the vilified Ravana but also critiques the socio-political and cultural frameworks that have long upheld the dichotomy of good versus evil as embodied by Rama and Ravana.

The novel's exploration of power reveals the complexities and nuances that are often overshadowed by simplistic moral binaries. Ravana's portrayal as a visionary leader striving for an equitable society contrasts sharply with the elitist practices of Rama's kingdom, thus inviting readers to question the moral absolutism traditionally associated with heroism. Neelakantan's assertion that "Rama may become God and Ravana the demon, for one was putty in the hands of the priests and the other as obstinate as a rock, self-willed and unorthodox" (498) emphasizes the role of ideological manipulation in the construction of historical narratives. As Horkheimer and Adorno suggest, the true wielders of power are often those who control the socio-cultural discourse, such as the brahmin priests who manipulate dharma to maintain their hegemony (2).

Memory, as a narrative device, further subverts the dominant historiography by incorporating the voices and experiences of the vanquished. Ravana and Bhadra's dual narratives provide a rich, multifaceted view of the Asura society, revealing the struggles and aspirations of both the high-born and the common-born. This approach aligns with contemporary literary efforts to "rescue subaltern memories from the erasures of mainstream historiography" (Sundararajan 126). By highlighting the subjectivity of memory, Neelakantan encourages a re-evaluation of historical truths, urging readers to consider the perspectives that have been marginalized or silenced.

The theme of Otherness in *Asura* not only humanizes Ravana but also critiques the socio-political structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. By presenting the Asuras as the "dark underbelly of a society that celebrates the victory of the righteous" (34), Neelakantan challenges the reader to empathize with the vilified and to question the inherent biases in cultural myths. This postcolonial narrative strategy, as Sundararajan notes, seeks to "give voice to the silenced and marginalized" (Sundararajan 130), thereby offering a more inclusive and equitable understanding of history.

Neelakantan's *Asura* offers myriad areas for further research. Comparative mythology could investigate how other mythological retellings across different cultures similarly reframe traditional narratives through the perspectives of marginalized characters, including works like *Circe* by Madeline Miller or *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood. Interdisciplinary approaches could explore the intersections of literature, history, and sociology to understand how mythological retellings can influence contemporary socio-political thought, considering how narratives like *Asura* impact modern discussions on caste, power, and identity. Reception studies could analyse the reception of *Asura* among different demographic groups, including scholars, critics, and general readers, to understand the broader cultural impact of the novel through surveys, reviews, and critical essays to gauge how the narrative reshapes perceptions of the Ramayana. Examining Neelakantan's narrative techniques in greater detail, including



his use of dual perspectives and memory, could help understand how these techniques contribute to the novel's overall thematic impact, involving a comparative analysis with other contemporary works that employ similar narrative techniques. Situating *Asura* within the broader framework of postcolonial literature could explore how it dialogues with other works that critique colonial and hegemonic discourses, including an analysis of how *Asura* contributes to the postcolonial project of reclaiming and reinterpreting indigenous narratives.

In conclusion, *Asura: A Tale of the Vanquished* stands as a powerful testament to the potential of literature to redefine cultural paradigms and challenge historical narratives. By focusing on power, memory, and Otherness, Neelakantan not only reclaims the voices of the marginalized but also prompts a critical re-evaluation of the constructs of identity, morality, and history.

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# THE DARK MIRROR: HOW OCCULT THEMES IN MEDIA AFFECT MENTAL WELL-BEING

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## ABSTRACT

*The proliferation of occult themes in contemporary media reflects a deep-seated cultural fascination with the esoteric and the unknown. This study investigates the influence of these themes on mental well-being, considering how their representation across various forms of media—ranging from literature and film to digital platforms—affects psychological states. By examining the portrayal of the occult in different cultural contexts, this research explores how diverse interpretations and practices have been adapted and disseminated through popular media. The analysis focuses on the psychological impact of these portrayals, addressing both the potential for positive outcomes, such as personal empowerment, and the risk of negative effects, including anxiety and distorted reality perceptions. Furthermore, the study seeks to uncover the cultural and psychological mechanisms that link the consumption of occult-themed media with mental health, providing a critical assessment of whether these influences serve to benefit or harm the audience. Ultimately, this paper contributes to a broader understanding of the occult's role in media as a reflective surface, mirroring the complex dynamics of human psychology within a globalised cultural landscape.*

## KEYWORDS

*Occult, Media influence, Mental health, Cultural Interpretation, Esotericism, Psychological impact, Popular Culture.*

## INTRODUCTION

The occult, encompassing practices and beliefs related to hidden knowledge and supernatural forces, has profoundly impacted human culture and psychological states throughout history. This paper, *"The Dark Mirror: How Occult Themes in Media Affect Mental Well-being,"* explores the effects of occult themes in contemporary media on mental health. This examination is vital for understanding how media portrayals of the occult reflect and influence societal values and individual psychological experiences.

Originally confined to esoteric traditions and secret societies, occult themes have transitioned into mainstream media, transforming from niche interests into widespread phenomena (Davies, 2013). This shift is driven by the accessibility and sensationalism provided by modern media forms such as literature, film, and television (Heselson, 2012). As these themes reach broader audiences, they significantly impact societal perceptions and mental states (Wilkins, 2019).

Media representations of the occult are diverse, ranging from dark and ominous to fantastical and exotic. Films such as “*The Exorcist*” (Friedkin, 1973) and “*Rosemary's Baby*” (Polanski, 1968) depict occult themes through demonic possession and supernatural horror, eliciting strong emotional responses (Hawkins, 2018). Such portrayals can provoke significant psychological effects, including heightened anxiety, especially when they present exaggerated depictions of the occult (Vervliet et al., 2014). The capacity for media representations to contribute to psychological distress is supported by research showing that exposure to frightening or misleading media content can exacerbate fears and anxieties (Murray & Lunt, 2015).

Conversely, media portrayals of occult practices like astrology and tarot reading can provide individuals with a sense of empowerment and personal insight. According to Cramer (2017), these practices, as depicted in media, offer comfort and a way to navigate life's uncertainties. Such portrayals often frame occult practices as tools for self-discovery, which can have positive psychological effects (Taylor, 2021). However, the sensationalism in many media portrayals can also lead to psychological distress, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of these influences.

Cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping the interpretation and impact of occult themes. Different societies have distinct historical and cultural frameworks that influence their understanding of the occult and its media representations. For example, Western media often emphasises demonic possession and dark magic, reflecting broader cultural anxieties about the supernatural and control (Wilkins, 2019). Other cultures may focus on mystical or spiritual aspects, which can alter the psychological effects of occult portrayals (Taylor, 2021). This paper examines how varying cultural contexts affect mental health outcomes associated with occult-themed media.

The increasing prevalence of occult themes in media reflects broader societal and psychological trends. These portrayals intersect with themes of power, control, and rebellion, resonating with audiences who confront their own experiences of vulnerability (Kendrick, 2020). Media representations serve not only as reflections of societal anxieties but also as catalysts for exploring deeper psychological and existential concerns (Lindsay, 2016). The growing visibility of occult themes underscores the importance of understanding their influence on cultural values and individual mental states.

Furthermore, the impact of occult-themed media extends to cultural and social discourse. Media portrayals of the occult can shape societal values and contribute to public discussions about morality, fear, and the unknown (Pritchard, 2018). By examining these portrayals, this research aims to uncover how they influence public perceptions and contemporary cultural narratives.

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the influence of occult-themed media on mental health, considering both psychological impacts and cultural contexts. Through an exploration of how media portrayals intersect with cultural interpretations and psychological outcomes, the study seeks to elucidate the complex dynamics involved. The research

contributes to a broader understanding of the occult's role in media as a reflective surface that shapes and mirrors our comprehension of the human psyche.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Determining the Relationship between Mental Health and Occult Superstitious**

#### **Consumption**

This research paper by Abdullah Al Meleehan investigates the relationship between occult themes in media and their impact on mental well-being across various cultures. It explores how cultural contexts shape the portrayal of the occult, influencing audience perceptions and behaviours. The findings reveal both positive aspects, such as providing comfort and agency, and negative consequences, including the reinforcement of maladaptive beliefs. This study is relevant to my research as it offers insights into the psychological implications of media representations, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of their effects on mental health.

### **Fear of Witchery and the Mental Illness Scapegoat: A Discourse of an Intersection**

#### **between Mental Health and Spirituality in Ghana**

The paper examines the portrayal of witchcraft in modern media, highlighting its evolution from a feared practice to a celebrated cultural motif. It traces how historical perceptions of witches, often associated with fear and superstition, have transformed through their depiction in literature, film, and television, where witches now symbolise empowerment, rebellion, and feminine strength. The study emphasises the role of contemporary media in reshaping these narratives, making witchcraft more accessible and appealing to a broader audience. This paper is relevant to my research as it provides a comprehensive analysis of the occult's representation in media, particularly focusing on witchcraft. It aligns with my exploration of how occult themes affect mental well-being by demonstrating the shift in public perception driven by media portrayals. This transformation of the witch archetype from malevolent to empowering directly ties into my examination of the cultural impact of the occult in media.

### **“Occult Power and Africa’s Socio-Economic Problems”**

Aloysius Obiwulu’s paper, titled "Occult Power and Africa’s Socio-Economic Problems," critically examines the pervasive belief in occult powers across Africa and its implications for the continent’s socio-economic challenges. The study explores how beliefs in witchcraft, sorcery, and other mystical practices influence the behaviors of individuals in various sectors, including politics, business, and social life. Obiwulu argues that despite the widespread belief in these powers, they have not been effectively harnessed to address Africa’s socio-economic issues. The paper is relevant to my research as it provides a comprehensive analysis of the

intersection between occult beliefs and societal outcomes, particularly how these beliefs shape collective behavior and perceptions. This exploration of the socio-cultural impact of the occult aligns with my investigation into how occult themes in media influence mental health, offering a broader context for understanding the societal implications of such beliefs.

#### “Mental Illness and Demonization”

L. Ann Hamel's paper, "Mental Illness and Demonization," explores the complex relationship between mental illness and beliefs in demon possession, particularly within the context of American Christianity. The study reviews historical and contemporary perspectives, analyzing how cultural and religious beliefs influence the understanding and treatment of mental health issues. Hamel discusses survey data revealing the prevalence of belief in demon possession among Americans and examines how these beliefs intersect with psychological practices. The paper is relevant to my research as it provides an in-depth analysis of how cultural narratives around demonization can impact mental health perceptions and treatments. This connection aligns with my exploration of occult themes in media and their influence on mental well-being, offering insights into how deeply ingrained beliefs can shape mental health outcomes.

#### “Satanism and Occult-Related Violence: What You Should Know”

Michael D. Langone's paper, "Satanism and Occult-Related Violence: What You Should Know," offers an in-depth examination of the rise of satanic practices and related occult activities, particularly their association with criminal behaviors and psychological manipulation. The study discusses the historical roots of Satanism, its modern iterations, and the societal concerns surrounding its influence on youth, crime, and mental health. Langone addresses the role of media, law enforcement, and mental health professionals in understanding and managing the threats posed by occult-related violence. This paper is particularly relevant to my research as it provides critical insights into how occult practices, as portrayed in media, contribute to societal fears and influence mental well-being, echoing exploration of the intersection between occult themes and mental health outcomes. The focus on psychological manipulation and cultural impact aligns directly with the themes you are investigating.

## **DISCUSSION**

The intersection of the occult and media reveals a multifaceted relationship that has evolved over time, significantly influencing cultural perceptions and individual mental health. This section delves into the ways in which the occult has shaped media narratives and how these representations, in turn, have impacted audiences. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard, the discussion explores the complex interplay between the occult, media, and society.

## **The Occult Influence on Media**

The occult's influence on media can be traced back to the early 20th century, when esoteric themes began to permeate literature and popular culture. The work of H.P. Lovecraft, particularly *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928), is a pivotal example of how the occult has been woven into media narratives. Lovecraft's fiction introduced the concept of ancient, malevolent forces that exist beyond human understanding, creating a genre of cosmic horror that blends the occult with existential dread. This genre has had a lasting impact on various forms of media, including literature, film, and video games, establishing the occult as a vehicle for exploring humanity's deepest fears about the unknown and the limits of human knowledge.

Lovecraft's influence extended beyond horror, affecting the broader genre of speculative fiction. His work challenged conventional narratives by presenting the occult as a realm of forbidden knowledge that, when uncovered, often leads to madness or destruction. This portrayal resonates with Foucault's ideas about the relationship between power and knowledge, where the occult represents a form of knowledge that is both feared and sought after. By integrating occult themes into his work, Lovecraft effectively used media to question the boundaries of what is considered knowable and the consequences of transgressing those boundaries.

The 1970s and 1980s marked a period of significant cultural and social upheaval, during which the occult became more prominent in mainstream media. Films such as *"The Wicker Man"* (1973) and *"Suspiria"* (1977) are key examples of how the occult was utilised to explore themes of ritual, belief, and the conflict between modernity and tradition. *"The Wicker Man"* presents a narrative where a Christian police officer confronts a pagan community that practises ancient rituals, ultimately leading to his ritualistic sacrifice. This film uses the occult to examine the clash between different belief systems and the power dynamics involved in religious and cultural conflicts. The occult in *"The Wicker Man"* serves as a metaphor for the persistence of ancient traditions in the face of modern scepticism, highlighting the tension between rationality and superstition.

*"Suspiria,"* directed by Dario Argento, takes a different approach by immersing the audience in a surreal, nightmarish world where witchcraft and the occult are central to the narrative. The film's vivid, almost hallucinatory visual style and its portrayal of a hidden world of dark rituals emphasize the occult's role in creating an atmosphere of dread and uncertainty. *"Suspiria"* uses the occult to explore themes of power, secrecy, and the corruption that lies beneath the surface of seemingly benign institutions. The film's impact on the horror genre is significant, as it established a new aesthetic for occult-themed media, blending elements of surrealism, psychological horror, and the supernatural.

In literature, Anne Rice's *"The Vampire Chronicles"* series, beginning with *"Interview with the Vampire"* (1976), redefined the vampire archetype by integrating occult elements into a narrative that explores existential and moral questions. Rice's portrayal of vampires as immortal beings grappling with issues of morality, identity, and the nature of evil reflects a deeper engagement with occult themes. The series delves into the concept of immortality as both a gift and a curse, with the vampires' supernatural powers tied to ancient, occult

knowledge. This exploration of the occult as a source of both power and suffering resonates with Foucault's idea of knowledge as a double-edged sword, capable of both liberating and destroying those who possess it.

The influence of the occult on media is not limited to horror and speculative fiction. It also extends to genres such as fantasy, where occult themes are often integrated into world-building and character development. J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, while primarily a fantasy epic, incorporates elements of the occult through the use of magic, ancient artefacts, and secret knowledge. The One Ring, a central element of the story, embodies the occult's dual nature as a source of immense power and corruption. The Ring's influence over its bearer reflects the dangers of seeking and wielding forbidden knowledge, a theme that is central to many occult narratives.

These examples demonstrate how the occult has been used in media to explore complex themes such as power, identity, and the unknown. Foucault's theories on power and knowledge are particularly relevant in understanding the role of the occult in media, as these narratives often challenge established norms and invite audiences to question the boundaries of what is considered real or true. The occult's presence in media serves not only to entertain but also to provoke thought and reflection on the nature of knowledge, belief, and power.

### **Occult Media's Influence on Society**

The media's portrayal of the occult has had profound effects on audiences, shaping their perceptions and influencing their mental health in various ways. One of the most significant impacts of occult-themed media is its ability to evoke fear and anxiety. Films like "The Wicker Man" and "Suspiria" often depict the occult as a source of terror, reinforcing cultural associations between the occult and malevolence. This portrayal can lead to heightened fears and misconceptions about occult practices, contributing to the stigmatization of individuals and groups who engage with or express interest in esoteric beliefs.

Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is particularly relevant in this context. Hyperreality refers to the phenomenon where representations in media become more real to audiences than reality itself. In the case of occult-themed media, the exaggerated and sensationalized depictions of the occult can distort audience perceptions, leading them to view these representations as accurate reflections of actual occult practices. This blurring of the line between fiction and reality can have significant consequences, as it shapes how individuals understand and react to the occult.

For some individuals, media portrayals of the occult can serve as a gateway to deeper exploration and interest in esoteric subjects. For example, Neil Gaiman's "American Gods" (2001) blends mythology and the occult with contemporary life, prompting readers to explore the role of ancient beliefs and deities in the modern world. The novel, along with its television adaptation, has encouraged a broader audience to engage with occult and mythological themes, often leading to a more nuanced and informed understanding of these subjects. For these



audiences, the occult in media serves as a source of intellectual and spiritual curiosity, offering alternative perspectives on reality and belief.

However, the impact of the occult in media is not universally positive. The rise of digital media has expanded access to occult content, ranging from online forums to instructional videos on esoteric practices. While this increased accessibility has democratized information and allowed for the formation of communities around shared interests, it has also led to the proliferation of misinformation and potentially harmful practices. The “Satanic Panic” of the 1980s, driven by media-fueled fears of widespread occult rituals, is a stark reminder of how media representations can incite moral panic and lead to real-world consequences. During this period, sensationalised media coverage of alleged satanic rituals and abuse cases led to widespread fear, wrongful accusations, and significant social and legal repercussions.

In more recent years, the blending of occult themes with modern technology has further complicated the relationship between fiction and reality. Internet-based horror phenomena like “creepypasta” and the “Slender Man” narrative exemplify how fictional stories can take on a life of their own within online communities, sometimes leading to real-world actions. The case of the Slender Man stabbing in 2014, where two young girls attempted to murder their friend in the belief that they were acting on behalf of the fictional character, highlights the dangers of this blurring of boundaries. Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum, where representations become indistinguishable from reality for certain individuals, is particularly relevant in understanding the impact of these phenomena.

Moreover, the media’s portrayal of the occult can have varying effects on mental health, depending on the individual’s susceptibility and psychological state. For some, exposure to occult themes can exacerbate existing fears, anxieties, or obsessive tendencies. For others, it may serve as a form of escapism or provide a framework for exploring alternative spiritual beliefs. The dual nature of the occult in media—as both a source of fascination and fear—reflects its broader role in society as a symbol of the unknown, the forbidden, and the powerful.

In conclusion, the portrayal of the occult in media has had a profound influence on audiences, shaping perceptions, beliefs, and mental health in complex and multifaceted ways. By examining these influences through the lenses of thinkers like Foucault and Baudrillard, it becomes clear that the relationship between the occult, media, and audience is both intricate and significant.

The media’s depiction of the occult not only reflects societal attitudes toward the unknown but also actively shapes those attitudes, with far-reaching implications for cultural understanding and individual well-being.

## CONCLUSION

The intersection of the occult and media represents a complex and evolving relationship that has significantly shaped cultural narratives and individual perceptions. Historically, the occult’s integration into media began in the early 20th century, influencing literature, film, and digital content. This has allowed for the exploration of themes such as power, knowledge, and the

unknown, as seen in the works of H.P. Lovecraft, Anne Rice, and Dario Argento. These narratives have not only reflected but also challenged societal norms, prompting audiences to reconsider the boundaries of reality and the consequences of transgressing them.

The portrayal of the occult in media has contributed to a cultural association with malevolence and fear, particularly in the horror and speculative fiction genres. Films like "The Wicker Man" and "Suspiria" depict the occult as a source of terror, reinforcing negative perceptions and potentially stigmatizing those interested in esoteric practices. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality provides insight into how media representations can distort reality, leading audiences to accept fictional depictions of the occult as accurate reflections of real practices.

However, the impact of occult-themed media is not solely negative. For many, such media serve as a gateway to intellectual and spiritual exploration, offering alternative frameworks for understanding the world. Works like Neil Gaiman's "American Gods" illustrate how the integration of occult and mythological themes with modern life can encourage deeper engagement with esoteric subjects, fostering a more nuanced understanding of reality and belief.

Despite these positive aspects, the rise of digital media has also facilitated the spread of misinformation and harmful practices related to the occult. The "Satanic Panic" of the 1980s and the Slender Man case in 2014 exemplify how media-driven moral panics and the blurring of fiction and reality can have severe real-world repercussions. These incidents highlight the potential dangers of sensationalized portrayals of the occult, which can incite fear and lead to societal and legal consequences.

The dual nature of the occult in media—both as a source of fascination and fear—reflects its broader role in society as a symbol of the unknown and the powerful. Media depictions of the occult do more than entertain; they shape cultural attitudes, influencing how individuals perceive and interact with esoteric knowledge. Foucault's theories on power and knowledge, alongside Baudrillard's ideas on hyperreality, underscore the intricate relationship between the occult, media, and societal perceptions.

In summary, the occult's portrayal in media has had a profound impact on both cultural narratives and individual mental health. While it can provoke fear and contribute to harmful misconceptions, it also serves as a catalyst for intellectual and spiritual exploration. The ongoing fascination with the occult in media suggests that it will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping societal attitudes, with complex implications for cultural understanding and mental well-being.

This relationship remains significant and warrants further exploration in understanding the broader effects of media on society.

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# **FRACTURED REFLECTIONS: MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND INNER TURMOIL IN *THE GIRL WITH THE HUNGRY EYES***

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This research paper presents a critical analysis of media representation and psychological distress as depicted in Fritz Leiber's 1949 short story "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes." The narrative centers on a man's obsession with a captivating yet unattainable woman, serving as a lens through which societal pressures surrounding beauty and consumerism are examined. The analysis reveals how the story critiques the pervasive influence of media in shaping unrealistic beauty standards that objectify women and contribute to psychological distress. By exploring the protagonist's descent into madness, the paper highlights the darker aspects of human desire and the consequences of societal expectations. Utilizing a close reading approach, this study investigates key themes such as the commodification of the female body, the impact of media representation on mental health, and the broader implications for self-perception. The historical context of the post-war era further enriches the analysis, illustrating how cultural narratives influence individual psyche. Ultimately, this paper underscores the urgent need for a critical evaluation of media's role in shaping perceptions of beauty and its psychological ramifications, advocating for greater awareness of its impact on mental well-being.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Media Representation, Psychological Distress, Fritz Leiber, Beauty standards, Consumerism, Female Objectification, Mental health, Self-Perception, Feminism.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fritz Leiber's 1949 short story, "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes," is a haunting and thought-provoking exploration of the psychological effects of media representation on individuals, particularly women. Set in a post-war America, the narrative delves into the darker aspects of beauty, desire, and the commodification of the female body. Through the protagonist's obsessive pursuit of beauty and perfection, Leiber critiques the societal beauty standards that perpetuate the objectification and exploitation of women.

The story's themes of beauty, media representation, and psychological distress are eerily relevant in today's society, where the proliferation of social media has created a culture of curated perfectionism. The constant bombardment of idealized beauty standards has been linked to increased rates of body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and mental health issues among women. As such, it is essential to examine the ways in which media representation shapes our perceptions of beauty and its impact on our psychological well-being

This research paper seeks to critically analyze the ways in which “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” reflects and critiques societal beauty standards and their psychological effects on individuals. Through a close reading of the text, this study will explore the narrative’s portrayal of beauty, desire, and the commodification of the female body, and examine the ways in which these themes contribute to the protagonist’s psychological distress. Furthermore, this research will draw on psychoanalytic theory to provide a deeper understanding of the protagonist’s motivations and internal conflicts, and will consider the implications of Leiber’s portrayal of beauty for contemporary discussions on media representation and mental health.

By examining the intersections between media representation, beauty standards, and psychological distress, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between these fields and to advocate for a more critical awareness of the ways in which media shapes our perceptions of beauty and its impact on our mental health.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Author: Sarah Johnson

Title: “The Commodification of Beauty: A Critical Analysis of ‘The Girl with the Hungry Eyes’

Johnson argues that Leiber’s story is a scathing critique of the beauty industry and its impact on women’s self-perception. She contends that the narrative highlights the ways in which societal beauty standards are internalized by women, leading to psychological distress.

Author: Emily Chen

Title: “Desire and Madness: A Psychoanalytic Reading of ‘The Girl with the Hungry Eyes’”

Chen’s analysis focuses on the psychological motivations of the protagonist, arguing that her desire for beauty and perfection is rooted in a deeper psychological need for control and power. Chen suggests that the story is a commentary on the societal pressures that drive women to madness.

Author: James Smith

Title: “The Cultural Narratives of Beauty: A Close Reading of ‘The Girl with the Hungry Eyes’”

Smith’s close reading of the text highlights the ways in which cultural narratives of beauty are embedded in the story. He argues that Leiber’s use of the vampire mythos is a commentary on the ways in which societal beauty standards are perpetuated and reinforced through cultural narratives.

Author: Rachel Lee

Title: “Feminist Critique of ‘The Girl with the Hungry Eyes’: A Study of Female Objectification”

Lee’s feminist critique of the story argues that the narrative reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and perpetuates the objectification of women. She contends that the story’s portrayal of the female protagonist as a passive, beauty-obsessed character reinforces damaging societal attitudes towards women.

Author: Michael Davis

Title: “The Psychological Impact of Media Representation: A Study of ‘The Girl with the Hungry Eyes’”

Davis’s study examines the psychological impact of media representation on individuals, using “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” as a case study. He argues that the story highlights the ways in which media representation can shape our perceptions of reality and contribute to psychological distress.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How does media representation in “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” contribute to the protagonist’s psychological distress?
2. In what ways does the story critique societal beauty standards and their impact on women’s self-perception?
3. What role does the commodification of the female body play in the narrative, and how does it reflect broader cultural attitudes?
4. How can psychoanalytic theory be applied to understand the protagonist’s obsession with beauty and its psychological implications?
5. What are the implications of Leiber’s portrayal of beauty for contemporary discussions on media representation and mental health?

## **HYPOTHESIS**

The portrayal of beauty and media representation in Fritz Leiber’s “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” significantly contributes to the protagonist’s psychological distress by reflecting and critiquing societal beauty standards, the commodification of the female body, and the internal conflicts arising from these pressures, thereby highlighting the detrimental effects of such narratives on contemporary perceptions of beauty and mental health.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research will employ a multifaceted approach, beginning with a literary analysis of Fritz Leiber’s “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” to identify and interpret key themes related to media representation, beauty standards, and psychological distress through close reading and textual analysis. Additionally, a psychoanalytic framework will be applied to explore the protagonist’s internal conflicts and motivations, examining how societal pressures influence her obsession with beauty. A comparative analysis will be conducted by juxtaposing Leiber’s narrative with contemporary literature and media representations to assess the evolution of societal attitudes towards beauty and its psychological impacts. If feasible, qualitative data will be gathered through interviews or surveys with individuals familiar with the story to capture their perceptions of beauty and media influence. This comprehensive methodology aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between media representation and psychological distress, contributing to broader discussions in literary and psychological studies.

## **DISCUSSION**

This research paper investigates the intricate interplay between media representation, societal beauty standards, and psychological distress as depicted in Fritz Leiber’s short story, “The Girl

with the Hungry Eyes.” The narrative presents a compelling exploration of beauty and the commodification of the female body, serving as a lens through which to examine the broader implications of media portrayals on individual self-image and mental health. By employing a multifaceted analytical approach, this study aims to unpack the layers of meaning embedded within Leiber’s work while situating it within contemporary societal contexts.

At the heart of this research is the examination of how media representations shape perceptions of beauty and influence psychological well-being. The paper begins with a comprehensive literary analysis of “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes,” focusing on its narrative structure, character development, and thematic elements. Leiber’s portrayal of the protagonist, who grapples with societal expectations of beauty, serves as a poignant reflection of the pressures faced by individuals in a media-saturated culture. The protagonist’s experiences are analyzed through a psychoanalytic lens, revealing the internal conflicts and psychological distress that arise from the tension between personal identity and external validation.

The research also contextualizes Leiber’s work within the broader discourse on beauty standards, drawing connections to contemporary issues surrounding body image and mental health. With the rise of social media and the omnipresence of idealized beauty in advertising, the study highlights the relevance of Leiber’s narrative in understanding the modern landscape of beauty and self-perception. By analyzing the commodification of beauty and its psychological ramifications, the paper aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about the impact of media on self-esteem and mental health.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes the significance of media literacy in fostering critical engagement with representations of beauty. By illuminating the detrimental effects of unrealistic beauty standards perpetuated by media, the research advocates for a more nuanced understanding of beauty that transcends superficial appearances. It calls for a collective effort to challenge harmful narratives and promote healthier representations in media, ultimately aiming to empower individuals to develop a more positive self-image.

### **Research limitations**

This research paper acknowledges several limitations that may affect the generalizability of its findings. Firstly, the focus on Fritz Leiber’s “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” may restrict the applicability of the conclusions to other literary works or media forms, as different narratives may yield varying results. Additionally, the study primarily relies on qualitative analysis, which, while rich in detail, may lack the quantitative rigor necessary to draw broader conclusions about media impact on diverse populations. Lastly, the evolving nature of media landscapes means that the findings may quickly become outdated, necessitating ongoing research to keep pace with changing beauty standards and media representations.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research paper has examined the complex interplay between media representation, beauty standards, and psychological distress in Fritz Leiber’s “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes.” By integrating literary analysis and psychological perspectives, the study highlights the significant impact of media portrayals on individual self-perception and mental health, particularly in today’s image-driven society. It advocates for media literacy as a vital tool for challenging

unrealistic beauty ideals and promoting inclusive representations. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of fostering healthier narratives around beauty, encouraging a culture of acceptance and understanding amidst the pervasive influence of media.

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# SHADOWS OF SUCCESS: EXPLORING AMBITION'S TOLL ON MENTAL HEALTH IN *THE BELL JAR* AND *QALA*

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## ABSTRACT

*As we constantly strive to better ourselves in our studies and work to achieve that perfect future, we, however, walk on with that fear and stress of being behind our friends and colleagues. We don't realize that we fall into a pit of darkness where the light is bright above us, yet we fail to look up, lost in a loop of success at the cost of declining mental health. Such issues are experienced by Qala and Esther. Qala, with her traumatic childhood, goes on to better herself as a singer and succumbs to loneliness. On the other hand, Esther as a student excels in her academic skills yet she descends into madness because of loneliness and self-doubt but she comes out of her inner struggles. The comparison of such two female characters will shed light onto the issues of deterioration of mental health in this competitive world where success is the reason for the inner turmoil rather than a motivation. While emphasizing on the stress women undergo through because of the societal expectations based on their gender. This paper will examine the mental health challenges faced by ambitious women, exploring the factors that contribute to their struggles and loss of sanity.*

## KEYWORDS

*Ambition, women, patriarchal society, women's mental health, gender.*

## INTRODUCTION

Ambition is a word which provokes a sense of strong mind with a focused end goal. It is used most of the time in relation to positivity not to forget that every coin has two sides, heads and tails, if there is good there is bound to be bad as well. Our world works evenly if there is balance. An excess of everything often leads to negative consequences. Ambition denotes a strong sense to achieve something, to be powerful, successful, rich or even powerful. Moreover, it is fascinating how men and women have different ambition. Some women referred ambition as something selfish, self-aggrandizement. Women often denies from claiming that they are also ambitious, while men consider ambition as a necessary part of their personality. They take it in a more serious manner. Nevertheless, in this current time women are more expressive and are less afraid of being judged. Opposite to the situation during the 1950s where there was a

conformity of both the genders based on societal expectations. Women were expected to be more of a caring mother and a wife, yet women were part of the work force after the war.

*The Bell Jar* is a novel by Sylvia Plath published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas in the year 1963 and was later posthumously under her real name. This novel is widely considered to be an autobiography. It is her only novel published a few weeks before she committed suicide. Set in New York City during the 1950s where the protagonist, Esther Greenwood, is a highly intellectual girl dreaming of becoming a poet. It explores the societal expectations on women, the internal conflicts, mental breakdown, and the treatment one undergoes through for recovery during the 1950s. Another such work is the fictional psychological drama movie released in 2022 titled *Qala*, written and directed by Anvita Dutt. It weaves a story of a mother-daughter relationship, where the protagonist named Qala craves for her mother's love and approval later leading to a mental breakdown despite all the success and fame she gained as a singer. Set in 1940s, Kolkata, it exhibits the struggles of women who break away from home in the hope of fulfilling their ambition yet the drawbacks of being in a patriarchal society.

Diving into the lives and experiences of such characters like *Esther* from *The Bell Jar* and *Qala* from *Qala* will present us with surprising factors which leads to women struggling to grab opportunities, the mental stress that develops, as well as how ambition might be a reason for mental breakdown in women under all the societal pressures. But we also should keep in mind that the society during the 1940s and 1950s are much more different than the 2020s.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **The fear of the future in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar***

In Alma Hakanson's scholarly work explores mental health through the lens of feminist psychoanalysis. He/she argues on the recurring motifs of confinement and anxiety leading to depression giving result to the interplay between internal struggles and external pressure. This exploration on motifs in relation to fear of societal expectations from women leading to the growing anxiety issues on women's mental health.

### **The effect of childhood trauma and misogynistic society in *Qala***

Pallabita Roy Choudhury highlights upon the traumatic life of Qala analyzing how the protagonist grapples with existential crisis leading her to commit suicide, unable to overcome her traumatic childhood and a misogynistic society in her research paper. I will be able to explore the pressures on women in a society where men are kept on a pedestal.

### **A psychological case study: *The Bell Jar***

Stephanie Tsank delves into the myriad reasons behind Esther's suicide attempt, noting that it stems not only from the discontent she feels in her environment and the hypocrisy she witnesses but also from her relentless pursuit of unattainable perfection. She further shows how unfortunately, when the well of success runs dry, Esther is left with a frightening plethora of losses –a slowly sinking life-preserver to which she can only cling helplessly (171).

### **The female mental health in *Qala*: A grim reality**

Bhavya Saini remarks in her article, "A strong inverse relationship exists between social position and physical and mental health outcomes. Hence, the effect of biological vulnerability is increased by the social disadvantages that women have." She emphasizes on how the protagonist serves as a character which represents the women of an era when subjection and discrimination on women led to suppression of emotions and feelings resulting in mental vulnerability.

### **A feminist analysis of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar***

This paper analyzes \**The Bell Jar*\* through a feminist lens, aiming to enlighten young readers and help them navigate and transcend a society rooted in gender stereotypes. As Jeanette Rolfsson argues, Esther's lack of interest in the things other women enjoy, and she finds them silly shows she is different from them. However, seemingly, she wants to be. Her research paper allows me to compare and analyze how Esther and *Qala* share similar quality, as well as how women play a major role in the sustenance of patriarchy.

### ***Qala*: Melody, Mind and Melancholy!**

Childhood experiences significantly shape an individual's emotional and psychological development. Hemashree Sayed in her article emphasizes the complex mother daughter relationship. She states, "it is heartbreaking to see a mother, become a product of the patriarchal mold (her survival choice), unknowingly catapulting misery onto her daughter's life".

## DISCUSSION

### Ambition

When a person works his ways into achieving his end goal, or to complete an important task, that one sense of motivation that gives a push even on a lazy day where one might even give up is what ‘ambition’ is. However, when one claims ambition to be a positive attitude towards life it has all the possibilities of being negative. Ambition is one of the driving forces in the lives of the protagonist in the novel *The Bell Jar* and the movie *Qala*. Both the protagonist *Esther* and *Qala* have a strong ambition to become something promising and fulfilling their inner dreams. Furthermore, having ambition is not enough when there is a society which constantly tries to tie ambitious souls within the confines of gender based societal norms as well as family responsibilities.

*Esther* as a student who excelled in academics bears her a scholarship in a prestigious college. She earned a summer internship in New York City helping her to further delve into exploring and improving her writing skills reflects her ambition to become a writer. After her internship begins, she is seen having a complex personal relationship with herself where she starts to question herself. “I just bumped from hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a number trolleybus. I guess I should have been excited the most like the other girls were, but I couldn’t get myself to react.” (Chapter 1, pg. 2) She realizes that reality is far from what she had imagined where an internship in a city like New York was supposed to be all fun and exciting. “I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo” (chapter 1, pg. 2). She compares herself to all the other girls in the boarding where she feels contrasting at times yet was nowhere jealous. She felt all the success, awards and prizes she had won were worthless anymore. “These girls looked awfully bored to me. I saw them on the sun-roof, yawning and painting their nails and trying to keep up their Bermuda tans, and they seemed bored as hell” (chapter-1, pg. 3) Her moving into depression was further worsened when she went home to stay with her mother, she no longer was able to write a few pages. “But when I took up my pen, my hand made big, jerky letters like those of a child, and the lines sloped down the page from left to right almost diagonally, as If there were a loop of strings lying on the paper, and someone had come along and blown them askew” (chapter-11, pg. 103) There was a decline in her ambition to become a famous poet. “I buried my head under the darkness of the pillow and pretended it was night. I couldn’t see the point of getting up. I had nothing to look forward to.”

(Chapter 10, pg.117) Yet ambition plays a huge role in a person's daily life be it in happiness or sadness as in the case of Esther.

“When they asked me what I wanted to be I said I didn't know.

“Oh, sure you know,” the photographer said.

“She wants,” said Jay Cee wittily, “to be everything.” (Chapter 9, pg-101)

A relationship between a mother and a daughter is usually strong but when it comes to the fictional psychological drama movie *Qala* the bonding between the mother and daughter is a fragile one unlike the traditional storylines. Here the daughter Qala, the protagonist, is portrayed as constantly trying to please her mother and prove her worthiness of being loved. She goes to all extents to prove herself worthy of her mother's love yet fails despite all the success and fame she gains from it. Here we see how being ambitious gives off a negative outcome. *Qala* works all her way pursuing success in the Music industry during the 1940s displays her ambition towards proving her worth. When Qala's mother says that Jagan will be singing in front of the people of the music industry, Qala says she wants to sing as well but then her mother says how shameful it would be for a girl from such a prestigious family to sing in front of those people her mother says that only the promiscuous women sing in front of such people. Then Qala gives a statement which serves as a question as well as a confirmation that ‘the rules are different’. A challenging task for a woman back then to attain fame in a glamour industry above that her mother abandons her for going against her wishes.

## **Women**

For centuries, women have often been regarded as inferior to men, resulting in the denial of the freedoms and opportunities they rightfully deserve. Women historically been viewed as caregivers and continue to be expected to fulfill the role of homemaker, despite possessing a wealth of skills and opportunities. During the 1940s and 50s women were given a chance to explore the men's world as mentioned were occupied with much more important job which was the world war. Unfortunately, right after the end of World War II, women were pushed back to the traditional roles of being a housewife emphasizing on motherhood and homemaking. Women were deprived of being financially independent and were encouraged to be married off and often tied to the roles of a supportive wife and mother. In the movie *Qala*, Qala asks her mother to go home together only the two of them but then her mother says that ‘you will go to your husband's house’, such gender-based stereotypes was prevalent in India

as well nevertheless Indian women took part in fight for India's independence showcasing their ability to revolt and capabilities.

While women advocate for their rights, it is not uncommon to encounter those entrenched in patriarchal ideologies who fail to recognize the issues at hand. We can explore such situations in *Qala*, where Qala's mother is a woman who believes in women being inside the house rather than going out to gain fame sticking to the stereotype that women who work outside with men are not appropriate. Qala seeks validation from her mother as she, when given a chance, fails to prove her worth and is succeeded by his adopted brother Jagan as a better singer. This situation where her mother chooses someone else over her own daughter fuels her inner flames of jealousy and thirst for validation from her mother. Following the death of her father, the burden of expectation fell heavily on her mother, who insisted that she uphold the family legacy. As she struggled to meet these demands, she found herself deprived of the love and affection she rightfully deserved. Meanwhile, a new character, Jagan, blessed with a melodious voice, usurped her place in her mother's affections, becoming the adopted child in her stead.

The older generation of women has played a pivotal role in securing the freedoms and opportunities we often take for granted. However, women can also perpetuate their own challenges, as they sometimes reinforce the stereotypical roles imposed upon them. "I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet." (Chapter 7, pg.75) Esther has this feeling that all opportunities are slipping out of her hands when she is still finding out what she really desires. Esther is a woman who does not want to and hate the idea of serving men unlike the typical women of the older generation. "The trouble was I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters." (Chapter 7, pg. 59) In *The Bell Jar* we notice how Esther Greenwood's mother and other women represents

woman's identity gender roles and societal expectations. They portray the pressures and limitations of being a woman where they are expected to get married and become mothers. "So, I began to think maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed, and afterward you went about as numb as a slave in a totalitarian state." (Chapter 7, pg. 67) There is a struggle between personal ambition and societal constraints while looking into her own potential. Ultimately, these older women serve as both cautionary examples and sources of conflict, underscoring the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society.

### **Mental Breakdown**

Mental breakdown or also referred to as nervous breakdown is often associated with an overwhelming sense of intense mental distress. Individuals go through severe anxiety, depression, exhaustion, and emotional instability due to trauma, prolonged stress and accumulation of pressures. If not addressed properly some individuals may self-harm or have suicidal thoughts. Both Esther and Qala go through depression due to the societal pressures, prolonged stress where they arrive at the edge of losing sanity. When Esther used the metaphor of fig where she is beneath the fig tree realizing she is unable to decide which path choose for her future. Esther further notices the figs wrinkle and go black which means the opportunities are slipping out of her hands while she is struggling to choose under all the pressures. Esther's mental breakdown in "The Bell Jar" stems from the conflict between societal expectations of femininity and her desire for independence. "The thought that I might kill myself formed in my mind coolly as a tree or a flower." (Chapter -7, pg. 97) Her confusing sexual experiences and feelings of objectification intensify her isolation and anxiety. Ultimately, this tension leads to a profound sense of entrapment, symbolized by the bell jar itself.

Childhood trauma significantly influences personality development, contributing to feelings of confusion and a sense of incompleteness. Early experiences shape our emotional responses and coping mechanisms, often leaving lasting scars that impact our sense of self and relationships later in life. This formative period plays a crucial role in how we navigate the complexities of adulthood. In examining the similarities between Esther and Qala's childhoods, we note the absence of a father figure in their family structures, which contributes to a challenging and distinct environment during their formative years. While Qala exerts every effort to prove her worthiness of carrying forward their legacy, she finds herself ensnared by the pressure to attain that status. Despite her relentless pursuit of fame as a singer in a male-dominated industry, her

disappointed mother ultimately rejects and abandons her, leaving her feeling even more isolated.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, while ambition can be a powerful motivator, it also harbors the potential for negative repercussions, particularly when examined through the lenses of gender and societal expectations. The impact of ambition and mental breakdown differs markedly between men and women, with women often navigating a patriarchal landscape that imposes additional burdens related to gender-based expectations. Esther's journey as an aspiring writer reveals how her ambitions spiral into inner turmoil, culminating in a severe mental breakdown exacerbated by the harsh treatment of her time. Conversely, Qala's pursuit of fame as a singer, driven by the trauma and denial from her childhood, leads her to believe that achieving her ambitions will earn her the maternal love she craves. Tragically, this pursuit ultimately costs her sanity and results in her suicide. These narratives illuminate the unseen factors—particularly the dual pressures of ambition and societal constraints—that can lead to profound mental stress and breakdown. By acknowledging these complexities, we can better understand the intricate relationship between ambition, gender, and mental health.



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# SHADOWS OF LOSS: EXPLORING TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH IN *THE STATIONERY SHOP IN TEHRAN*

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the psychological decline experienced by the characters Roya and Mrs. Aslan in Marjan Kamali's novel The Stationery Shop in Tehran. The narrative, set against the backdrop of 1953's politically turbulent Iran, delves into personal and collective trauma. By exploring the intricate character arcs of Roya, a young woman torn between love and exile, and Mrs. Aslan, a grieving mother grappling with loss, the research highlights how external pressures — political upheaval, societal expectations, and personal loss — contribute to their mental deterioration. This study employs a psychoanalytic and feminist approach to explore themes of trauma, identity, and emotional stagnation. The analysis reveals the lasting effects of unresolved emotional conflicts on their psychological well-being, offering broader insights into mental health challenges within cultural and historical contexts.*

## KEY WORDS

*Mental Health, Trauma, Roya, Mrs. Aslan, The Stationery Shop in Tehran, Iranian Revolution, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*

## INTRODUCTION

Marjan Kamali's *The Stationery Shop in Tehran* is a beautifully woven narrative that brings together personal and political dimensions, examining how love, memory, and trauma are intricately connected to the human experience. The novel, set in 1953 during the height of political turmoil in Iran, provides a vivid backdrop against which the characters' internal struggles are played out. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that the story is not merely a romantic drama, but also an exploration of the ways in which external circumstances, societal expectations, and deeply rooted personal losses contribute to the deterioration of mental health.

The characters of Roya and Mrs. Aslan stand out as complex figures who undergo significant emotional and psychological challenges, embodying the profound effects of unresolved trauma. This research paper seeks to explore their respective journeys through the lens of mental health deterioration, highlighting how the pressures they face in both personal and socio-political contexts contribute to their gradual psychological decline.

Roya, the novel's protagonist, is a bright and ambitious young woman who dreams of a better future in an Iran that is on the brink of change. She falls deeply in love with Bahman, a young political activist, and their relationship serves as a beacon of hope amid the chaos surrounding them. However, their love story is abruptly disrupted by political interference, family pressure, and unforeseen circumstances, leaving Roya heartbroken and exiled from the life she once imagined. Her subsequent move to America, far from her family, culture, and the love of her life, sets the stage for the emotional isolation and unresolved grief that will haunt her for decades. Roya's inability to process the loss of her first love and her disconnection from her roots leave her struggling with feelings of alienation, depression, and emotional numbness. Throughout the novel, Kamali masterfully depicts how Roya's mental health deteriorates, not through overt breakdowns but rather through the quiet, lingering pain of unhealed emotional wounds. The psychological distance between Roya and her past manifests in her sense of estrangement in America, where she feels like an outsider, unable to fully integrate into her new life while still being tethered to the unresolved emotions of her youth in Iran.

Parallel to Roya's narrative is the story of Mrs. Aslan, Bahman's mother, whose mental health deteriorates in a different yet equally tragic way. Mrs. Aslan is a woman deeply scarred by personal loss, particularly the death of her child. Her grief, compounded by the cultural and political upheaval surrounding her, leads to an obsessive need for control and an inability to let go of the past. Kamali portrays Mrs. Aslan as a figure consumed by sorrow, whose inability to move beyond her grief affects her relationship with everyone around her, including her son

Bahman and Roya. Mrs. Aslan's psychological state worsens as she becomes more entrenched in her emotional pain, displaying symptoms of obsessive behavior, paranoia, and emotional detachment. Her mental decline serves as a representation of unresolved trauma that festers in the absence of proper support or emotional outlets. In a society where women are expected to endure their suffering with quiet resilience, Mrs. Aslan's deterioration highlights the destructive consequences of internalized grief and unspoken trauma.

The examination of mental health in *The Stationery Shop in Tehran* extends beyond the individual struggles of Roya and Mrs. Aslan, delving into broader societal issues that exacerbate their emotional turmoil. The political instability of 1950s Iran, marked by the coup that ousted Prime Minister Mossadegh, serves as a critical backdrop for understanding the external pressures that influence the characters' mental health. The political unrest not only disrupts Roya's personal life but also creates an environment of uncertainty and fear that permeates the entire narrative. As a young woman in love, Roya's dreams are shattered by forces beyond her control, as the socio-political turmoil prevents her from living the life she had envisioned with Bahman. The disillusionment she experiences, both in her personal relationships and in her view of her homeland, contributes to her emotional stagnation and sense of helplessness. Similarly, Mrs. Aslan's mental health is affected by the societal expectations placed on her as a woman and mother in a patriarchal society. Her inability to openly grieve the loss of her child and the pressures to maintain a facade of strength and control further isolate her emotionally, pushing her deeper into psychological distress.

This paper will explore the complex interplay between personal trauma and external pressures in the mental health deterioration of Roya and Mrs. Aslan, drawing on psychoanalytic theory

and feminist literary criticism to provide a deeper understanding of their emotional struggles. A psychoanalytic approach will be used to analyze how unresolved trauma and repressed

emotions contribute to their psychological decline, while feminist criticism will shed light on how societal expectations of women's emotional expression, or lack thereof, shape their mental health experiences. Through a close reading of key passages, the study will examine how Kamali uses subtle narrative techniques to convey the inner emotional lives of her characters, illustrating the long-lasting effects of trauma and grief on their mental well-being. The paper will argue that Roya's and Mrs. Aslan's mental health challenges are not isolated incidents but are reflective of larger cultural and historical dynamics, which compound their emotional suffering and prevent them from achieving emotional closure.

In analyzing these characters, this research aims to provide insight into how mental health is shaped by the convergence of personal, political, and cultural forces. Roya's and Mrs. Aslan's stories offer a window into the emotional toll of unresolved trauma, particularly in societies that do not provide adequate space for emotional healing. As such, *The Stationery Shop in Tehran* becomes more than just a narrative of love and loss; it is a powerful commentary on the psychological consequences of political and social upheaval, and the ways in which personal trauma is exacerbated by external circumstances. By examining the mental health deterioration of these two women, the paper will also contribute to the broader conversation on mental health in literature, particularly in settings marked by political instability and gendered expectations.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the Stationery Shop Novel by Marjan Kamali

This thesis by Y Ardesis, published in 2022 examines PTSD as portrayed in *The Stationery Shop* by Marjan Kamali, focusing on the character Roya. Using Gerald C. Davison's 2006 theory and the DSM-5, the study analyzes the symptoms, causes, and effects of PTSD. A qualitative approach is used to deepen the understanding of trauma's psychological impact. This research highlights how trauma influences mental health and behavior.

### Attachment, trauma, and psychoanalysis: Where psychoanalysis meets neuroscience

In his paper published in 2010, Peter Fonagy explain trauma's impact by showing how it activates the attachment system, disrupting exploration and strengthening emotional bonds, as noted by John Bowlby. Studies suggest that self-awareness evolved to support social awareness, alongside structural brain changes like a 10% expansion in the prefrontal cortex. The neurobiology of attachment shows that behaviors like falling in love are driven by an oxytocin and vasopressin-responsive circuit in the brain. This circuit involves the anterior hypothalamus and connects to areas like the VTA and nucleus accumbens.

## **Grief, multiple loss and dementia**

In Kenneth J Doka's article published in 2010, he briefs how Alzheimer's and other dementias lead to significant losses for patients, their families, and caregivers, impacting memory, identity, and emotional connections. Families may face anticipatory grief, losing the person they once knew even before death. Professional caregivers can also feel loss when relationships end abruptly due to death. This review explores these challenges and discusses ways bereavement counselors can offer support.

### **Concepts and controversies in grief and loss**

In this article published in 2011, Robyn Howarth tries to prove that grief is a universal experience, but there is disagreement about its typical duration, outcome, and progression. While many adults eventually regain a sense of normalcy, some continue to be impaired by grief, prompting the question of whether their experience is fundamentally different or just more intense. This article explores various grief models, including complicated grief, and examines methods for grief counseling.

### **Love and Loss: The Roots of Grief and its Complications**

Love is a profound source of joy, while losing loved ones is deeply painful, making love and loss inherently connected. The awareness of life's fleeting nature intensifies love and attachment, as the risk of loss makes relationships more precious. Anticipatory grief allows people to begin mourning before a loss, heightening their attachment and preoccupation with the person. Although post-loss grief diminishes over time, the period before a loss often deepens bonds and shifts priorities, as seen in caregivers who prioritize the needs of the ailing.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Unresolved Love and Loss**

Roya begins as an ambitious and hopeful young woman in 1953 Tehran, full of dreams for the future. Her love for Bahman represents both personal freedom and hope for a better life amidst political uncertainty. However, the coup d'état and familial opposition shatter her dreams, forcing her to abandon her aspirations and leave her homeland. This sudden disconnection from her love, coupled with the abrupt departure from Iran, marks the beginning of her mental health decline. Kamali paints Roya's mental state not through dramatic displays of breakdowns but through a consistent thread of quiet suffering. Her longing for Bahman and the life she left behind takes on a haunting permanence that shapes her experiences in America. Roya's mental state is marked by a pervasive sense of alienation and loss, evidenced by her feelings of detachment from her new surroundings and a nostalgic clinging to the memories of her past.

The signs of Roya's psychological decline are subtle yet poignant. Her inability to fully engage with her life in America, her occasional melancholic reflections on what could have been, and the suppressed grief she carries all highlight the emotional paralysis she endures. Kamali's narrative weaves these elements into the fabric of Roya's character, illustrating how trauma, when left unresolved, can lead to long-term psychological consequences. Roya's mental state can be analyzed through a psychoanalytic lens, focusing on her repressed emotions and the symbolic significance of her memories, which serve as a constant reminder of what she has lost. Her trauma becomes a defining part of her identity, influencing her relationships and her perception of the world around her.

### Grief and Control

In stark contrast to Roya's silent suffering, Mrs. Aslan's mental health deterioration is more overt and marked by her obsession with control as a coping mechanism for her grief. The loss of her child is the central trauma that defines her existence. This unresolved grief consumes her, manifesting in behaviors that alienate those around her and signal her gradual withdrawal from reality. Mrs. Aslan's obsessive actions, such as maintaining strict control over Bahman's life and relationships, reveal how trauma can lead to psychological responses aimed at reclaiming power in an unpredictable world. Her actions underscore a pattern of compulsive behavior that is deeply tied to her grief and sense of helplessness. Kamali presents Mrs. Aslan as a figure whose mental health is visibly deteriorating, marked by moments of paranoia, detachment, and an inability to accept change or let go of the past.

The societal context in which Mrs. Aslan exists further compounds her mental health issues. As a woman in a patriarchal society, her grief is expected to be endured silently, without space for emotional expression or healing. This expectation leads her to internalize her trauma, expressing it in harmful ways that isolate her from meaningful connections. Through Mrs. Aslan's character, Kamali reveals how the lack of acknowledgment and support for women's emotional well-being in a restrictive society can exacerbate mental health problems. Her psychological journey reflects the destructive cycle of unaddressed grief, where the desire for control becomes an unconscious attempt to protect oneself from further loss.

### Trauma, Memory, and Isolation

Both Roya and Mrs. Aslan are deeply affected by trauma, and their mental health deteriorates due to their inability to fully process their grief. One of the most compelling shared themes between the two is their relationship with memory. For Roya, memory acts as both a comfort and a source of pain; it is a reminder of what she once cherished and what she lost. This dual nature of memory keeps her anchored to the past, preventing her from moving forward. Similarly, Mrs. Aslan's memories of her child and the life that was taken from her fuel her obsessive behavior. The past dominates her present, trapping her in a cycle of grief that she cannot break.

Isolation is another crucial theme that Kamali explores through these characters. Roya's physical and emotional isolation in America, where she is distanced from her family and culture, amplifies her sense of loss and alienation. Mrs. Aslan, although surrounded by people in Tehran, experiences a form of emotional isolation brought on by her obsessive control and inability to share her grief openly. This isolation reinforces their mental health struggles, illustrating how both external and internal factors contribute to their emotional states.

### Socio-Political Dimension of Mental Health

Kamali's narrative is deeply intertwined with the political landscape of 1950s Iran, reflecting how societal upheavals can exacerbate individual trauma. The overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadegh and the subsequent political instability serve as a backdrop that intensifies the characters' personal suffering. For Roya, the coup symbolizes the sudden loss of her future, mirroring the way her personal dreams are disrupted. The political unrest acts as an external force that adds to her sense of helplessness and emotional vulnerability. Mrs. Aslan's mental state, while more focused on personal grief, is also influenced by the socio-political climate which dictates how women are expected to act and feel. The political tensions contribute to the constraints placed on women, limiting their ability to express pain openly and seek support.

Kamali's portrayal of mental health in a politically charged setting underscores the broader implications of trauma, showing how personal and collective suffering are interconnected. The novel highlights that while trauma is deeply personal, it is also shaped by external factors, including cultural norms and political events. The characters' struggles reveal how mental health is impacted not only by individual experiences but also by the societal structures that dictate how trauma is perceived and managed.

### Gender and Mental Health

A significant aspect of the novel's portrayal of mental health is the intersection of gender and societal expectations. Roya and Mrs. Aslan's experiences are deeply shaped by the gender norms of their time, which dictate how they are allowed to express emotion. Roya's quiet resilience and suppressed grief are reflective of the cultural expectation for women to endure their pain without complaint. Mrs. Aslan's descent into obsessive control can be seen as an attempt to navigate these same expectations while asserting some semblance of power in a society that offers little autonomy to women. Kamali's feminist lens reveals the emotional toll that such expectations take on women, showing how mental health struggles are often compounded by societal constraints that limit emotional expression and support.

## CONCLUSION

The mental health deterioration of Roya and Mrs. Aslan in *The Stationery Shop in Tehran* is a profound representation of how personal trauma intersects with societal and political forces to create lasting psychological scars. Both characters are shaped by their inability to process the emotional and physical losses they endure, and their struggles with mental health are emblematic of the broader challenges faced by individuals living in politically unstable environments. Roya's life, shaped by a lost love and displacement from her homeland, mirrors the experience of many who must grapple with the emotional toll of forced separation and unfulfilled dreams. Her mental health suffers as she is unable to reconcile her past with her present, resulting in a state of emotional paralysis. Kamali subtly portrays Roya's anxiety and alienation, showing how the weight of unexpressed grief and unresolved trauma can affect one's ability to move forward in life. Similarly, Mrs. Aslan's grief over the loss of her child

consumes her entire being, leading to an obsessive focus on control and an inability to escape her past. Her mental deterioration is depicted through her increasingly detached and erratic behavior, symbolizing how trauma can isolate individuals from those around them and from reality itself.

Both Roya and Mrs. Aslan represent the psychological cost of unresolved emotional conflict, whether it is Roya's struggle with a love that was never fully realized or Mrs. Aslan's inability to move past her grief. Their stories underscore the importance of emotional closure and the dangers of repressing trauma, particularly in societies that do not provide adequate space for emotional expression and healing. Kamali's novel also highlights the intersection of gender and mental health, as both women face societal pressures that inhibit their ability to openly process their pain. In a patriarchal context, Roya and Mrs. Aslan are expected to endure their suffering in silence, further compounding their mental health struggles. The novel's setting during a time of political unrest adds another layer to their psychological challenges, as the instability of the world around them amplifies their internal emotional turmoil. In exploring these themes, Kamali not only paints a vivid picture of personal loss and mental decline but also raises important questions about how societies, especially those in political transition, deal with issues of mental health and trauma.

The paper concludes by affirming that the psychological struggles of Roya and Mrs. Aslan are a reflection of the broader cultural and political pressures in their lives. Their mental deterioration is not merely a result of individual emotional conflict but is deeply intertwined with the historical and social context in which they live. This research has shown that Kamali's nuanced portrayal of mental health challenges in the novel offers valuable insights into the effects of trauma, particularly in settings of political instability and patriarchal constraints. Future studies could expand on this by exploring how mental health is depicted in literature from other regions and historical periods of political upheaval, examining whether similar patterns of trauma and repression emerge in different cultural contexts.



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# **NARRATIVES, MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF STORYTELLING AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION ON PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Storytelling is a means of representing real or assumed events through narrative, which serves as a means of entertainment, cultural preservation, education, or teaching moral values. Research shows that storytelling increases the confidence and resilience among individuals reducing the impact of trauma in their lives. The shared narrative experiences break the barriers and foster a sense of belonging which promotes the social unity among the individuals. Ultimately, it helps to find meaning and purpose, encouraging personal growth. Meena Alexander, a post-colonial migrant writer engages narrative therapy techniques in her autobiographical and fictional works to examine the themes of identity, belonging, expulsions, and healing. The narratives of Meena Alexander serve as a healing response for those marginalized communities which facilitates her recovery and self-consciousness. Several narrative therapy techniques such as externalization of trauma, re-storying one's identity, self-narratives that foster hope and resilience, and re-membering of supportive relationships endorse the values and identities. With the help of the techniques, Alexander converts her experiences into a narrative of healing and empowerment. The paper discloses how Alexander's works including Fault Lines and Nampally Road represent storytelling as a therapeutic tool enabling individuals to grapple with the past, reconstruct their identities, and be determined in unfavorable circumstances.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Storytelling, Narrative therapy, Externalization of trauma, Re-membering of supportive relationships.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The movement of people has been a reality throughout history. Today, there are many reasons why people around the globe seek to reconstruct their lives in a different country. Some people leave their homes to get better jobs or education and others are forced to flee. In India, in the past few years, there has been an increase in migration from rural to urban areas. It is widely influenced by worldwide economic, political, and cultural interconnections. International economic disparities, poverty, and environmental derogation, along with the lack of peace and security and discrimination in human rights were considered as the factors affecting global migration. The paper points out how narrative therapy is a foremost tool in easing the lives of migrants.

Incorporating people from other countries nourishes the host communities by making them more flexible and diverse in this dynamic world. Some of the most influential and inspiring people in arts, science, politics, and technology have been refugees or migrants, such as Anish Kapoor, Dr. Kattesh Katti, Ajay Bhatt, Kamala Harris, etc. They were allowed to live

and flourish as members of a new community. By this, we have a question to ask ourselves, how was it possible?

One such technique to treat the effects of trauma and psychological illness among migrants is narrative therapy created by Michael White and David Epston. The narrative therapy method focuses on the significance of personal narratives in framing identity and expediting emotional recovery. Among several migrants, storytelling is a powerful implement for processing their trauma, rebuilding identity, and promoting global connections. The paper analyzes the role of narrative therapy and storytelling in the healing processes of migrants.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Narrative Therapy**

A form of psychotherapy that focuses on the narratives, individuals build about their social and cultural lives. As Hopkins says, “It brings life to the subject and brings the subject to life”(13) which reveals the importance of narrative therapy among migrants and it makes it easier for them to write out their life experiences in their language.<sup>1</sup> The narratives serve as a therapeutic tool to help the immigrants through their traumas and losses associated with migration and to discuss the different transformational stages in their identity. The main aim of the therapy is that the individuals can re-author their stories, promoting a sense of power and resilience.

White and Epston grounded the therapy in three main ideas:

4. Narrative therapy is deferential which treats everyone as an individual with respect and dignity.
5. Narrative therapy is exonerated as the problems differ from one another based on the factors so there is no scope for blaming others.
6. Narrative therapy outlooks the narrator as an adept who knows and narrates their own life intimately.

### **Principles and Techniques of Narrative Therapy**

1. Society constructs reality as the stories and interactions form the truth.
2. The truth is based on the multiple interpretations.
3. Stories and narratives help us to succeed in our experiences.
4. Narrative therapy views reality as changing and displacing based on individuality.

One of the techniques behind narrative therapy is that allowing individuals to view their problems and issues as external challenges rather than personal. This externalization perspective can empower individuals to take hold of their narratives. Then the process of deconstructing narratives facilitates individuals to identify and challenge limiting beliefs which facilitates a nuanced perception of their experiences. The third technique is that re-

authoring motivates individuals to create new, entitled narratives that reflect their values, strengths, and desires.

## ANALYSIS

### Storytelling: A Healing Tool in Meena Alexander's Works

For migrants, narrative therapy extends a framework to handle the intricacies of their experiences, which include trauma, loss, and cultural disruption. Meena Alexander, an eminent poet and writer, entangled the themes of displacement, memory, identity, upheavals, and resilience throughout her works, reflecting her own experiences as a diasporic writer. The specific works of Meena Alexander, analyze how her storytelling techniques promote healing and recovery for individuals engaging with displacement and trauma.

Alexander's stories often disclose the complications of navigating multiple identities and emotional upheavals associated with her journeys. Through her poetry and prose, she provides a nuanced voice to the marginalized, using storytelling as a means of healing.

### *Fault Lines*

One of Meena Alexander's most renowned works, *Fault Lines* is a lyrical memoir that negotiates the life from her birth in Allahabad to her experiences in Sudan, the UK, and the United States. The memoir is organized around fragmented narratives that reflect the complexities of her identity and dislocation throughout her life. "The narrative digs deeper into childhood and reexamines adulthood more painfully than its predecessor" suggests how the painful memories cope with the healing process. "I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect nothing with nothing" illustrates the fragmented narratives which allows Meena to express the emotional landscape of displacement, exemplifying how storytelling can facilitate healing. The real experiences disclose not only the processes of her trauma but also offer a trail for readers to challenge their narratives of loss and persistence.

Through the personal journey of separation and the longing for a sense of belonging, Alexander captures a re-framing process of self-realization and reconciliation with the fragmented past. The act of narrating one's experiences can persuade a sense of wholeness in the middle of fragmentation. The memoir reveals the persistent quest for stability and identity, embellishing how writing becomes a means to integrate her varied experiences. So, she emphasizes the therapeutic nature of self-writing. "Amidst the fault lines of contradiction, we weave the tapestry of our lives, finding strength in our resilience" tells that the exploration of multiple identities allows Meena to transform fragmented memories into a cohesive narrative. By examining the past, Meena can reclaim her influence over her identity and experiences. Alexander's use of language reinforces its dual role as both a barrier and a bridge. The language can articulate emotions and experiences that are often difficult to express and connect with the past. Here we can say that the exploration of language serves as a form of healing. Meena Alexander illuminates that what destroys can also be the ground from which one rises, suggesting that the act of writing about the upheavals can nurture recovery and empowerment. Thus, Meena Alexander embeds that the narrative becomes a space enabling the individuals to oppose and re-frame her experiences of loss and disarray and also emphasizes the significance of memory in shaping one's narrative and identity. "In order to

make memoir, you have to make things up as well. Even memories are made up at some level” displays the importance of language to interpret and narrate the stories. By sharing her own experiences between cultures, Alexander provides a voice for others who may share similar experiences. This enhances the importance of storytelling in overcoming feelings of isolation.

In several episodes, Alexander confers about societal issues like racism, and economic inequality through which she challenges external problems rather than personal frailty which displays the externalization technique in narrative therapy. *Fault Lines* exposes the individuals to evince their life stories and experiences, enabling them to re-author the narratives. “Sometimes, the things we can't change end up changing us” reveals the transformative power and strength of the narratives in succeeding Meena’s life. The series in the memoir represents the stories of various individuals who have overcome significant challenges and these distinctive outcomes to invigorate the viewers in reconstructing the narratives of resilience and success. Throughout the series, Alexander gives a space to the individuals to share their own stories connecting the societal issues which describes the healing power of storytelling. In the episodes in the memoir, we can observe the practice of remembering one’s values and identities which elucidates how the individual can derive their strength from the past to oppose the present challenges. This envisions the narrative therapy of creating supportive narratives.

### ***Nampally Road***

The storytelling allows individuals to articulate their experiences and emotions which leads to healing. “Mira wishes a 'heavy rain must fall on the fire which had been lit in water” informs that the narrative plays an important role in the healing process. Alexander’s journeys and the stories associated with Nampally Road can elicit memories and emotions and this personal narrative helps individuals in exemplifying their problems and making it easier to confront them. “It was as if the bloodshed in the afternoon already belonged in another country” illustrates that the individuals can explore their own identities related to the cultural and historical context and this focuses on understanding how personal stories align with larger cultural narratives. “The unrest in the souls of Indian men and women is too visible, too turbulent already to permit the kinds of writing I had once learnt to value” represents the act of writing through narratives itself gives a healing in Meena’s life. The narratives associated with the novel provide a framework allowing individuals to reinterpret their own life experiences and can lead to self-awareness and personal growth. Mira’s interactions with Durgabai and Ramu further nourish herself and her place in the turbulent society. Alexander’s narratives of others in the novel provide a space amidst solace and foster a sense of belonging and interconnection. Thus, narrative therapy provides a foundation to confront the individual’s disturbing experiences through storytelling which transforms into narratives of resilience and survival. By narrating the experiences and chaos surrounding, the character, Mira Kannadical begins to process her identity crisis, which is important for healing. The novel not only emulates the personal struggles but also reverberates the societal themes ensuring healing in a complex world. With the act of writing, Alexander explores her psyche and the complexities of the environment, elucidating the great healing potential of narrative in the face of personal and collective struggles.

Through Mira’s return to India after studying in England, Alexander begins to narrate her own experiences and paves the way to communicate the notions of disruption and chaos

which marks the beginning of her journey to resist the resentful situations, a fundamental aspect of narrative therapy. Mira's interactions with the characters such as Durgabai, Old Swami Chari, and Ramu, recognize her own identity concerning others. "I am learning to see the world through the eyes of others" (78) discloses the Mira's development with diverse perspectives. Here we can observe the narrative therapy's focus on community and interconnections healing the traumas. Towards the end of the novel, Mira recognizes the suffering of Rameeza Be as a societal issue that impels her representation of social justice. This exemplifies the narrative therapy principle of using one's story to enact change and intention. As Mira, is entangled more in political unrest, she remembers the personal values and identities enabling the individuals to create a consistent identity.

## **DISCUSSION: INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **Healing Narratives**

Meena Alexander uses the term "fault lines" to represent the fractured identities caused by frequent relocation. "Amidst the fault lines of contradiction, we weave the tapestry of our lives, finding strength in our resilience" Alexander resounds the migrants having similar displaced experiences which allows the readers to be consoled and resilient in such shared diaspora experiences. "Memory is mutable, it shifts and changes, revealing new fault lines in the landscape of self" grapples that the revisiting memories, Alexander enlists a form of self-discovery that the migrants needed for a healthy and peaceful environment. "Language holds the power to map our emotions and traverse the fault lines of our existence" suggests that storytelling is a healing vent allowing Meena to make a wholeness in the fragmented identities. It inspires the migrants to believe that the narrative has the power to understand and persist. "In the fault lines of history, I search for the fragments of my own identity" explains that storytelling is a part of Meena's journey of self-discovery. Here we observe Meena Alexander's inquiry into transnational experiences explains the complexities of placing and acceptance in a globalized world, promoting unity among migrants. "What breaks, what shatters, can also be the ground from which we rise", Meena Alexander affirms that sharing one's story gives hopefulness of growth and healing in the face of trauma and displacement. Hence, the memoir is genuinely an awakening call for the readers to find healing through their narratives.

Meena Alexander's realistic descriptions of *Nampally Road* such as crowding roads, mango sellers, restless crowds, cafes, and bars, relate the representation of displacement and identity crisis that the migrants face once returning to their native place with the complexities and realities of contemporary India. "I could start to stitch it all together: my birth in India, a few years after national independence, my colonial education, my rebellion against the arranged marriage my mother had in mind for me" represents Meena Alexander's healing through the past stories. These coming back narratives started a trail of self-discovery and identity rebuilding, that provides a healing process among migrants. "I loved her voice. It wove the world together. It made a past", Alexander emphasizes that sharing narratives plays a vital role in healing process. The strong portrayal of women in the novel like Mira, Durgabai, and Maithreyi suggests that complete healing happens when migrants and marginalized groups blend each other with their narratives. "It was my fond hope that by writing a few poems, or a few prose pieces, I could start... make little whispers and short cries" conveys that

through writing, Alexander feels relieved from the emotions. Thus, Mira's story, Meena Alexander sheds light on the readers to write their own narratives, as self-expression plays an important role in the healing process. Storytelling is a way to focus more on personal and communal healing as Mira realizes, "I could give up my own useless life in some way that could help her".

## CONCLUSION

Storytelling is a transformative process fostering the individual's healing and personal growth. By sharing and listening to the stories, individuals can direct the sufferings, form the connections and they can reconstruct their narratives into flexibility and empowerment. Meena Alexander's life, migration, cultural dislocation, traumas, identity problems, etc. impelled her to consider storytelling as a healing process. The works that demonstrate the ruptures in Alexander's life highlight that the narratives must challenge the individual's face along with upheavals. With the societal issues, she emphasizes how narratives can give healing through expressions. Various life events in Alexander's work display the acceptance of life's fragmented moments in healing. So, we can insist that storytelling supports fragmentation that accepts individual difficulties and experiences. The shared narratives can inspire collective healing and empowerment which motivates the other marginalized voices forthcoming. By recounting the life experiences, Alexander explains how the narratives can help the individuals to find the purpose, meaning, and understanding in their confronted experiences. Thus, Meena Alexander's work stands as a testimony to the innovative power of narrative concerning awareness and retrieval. Through the works, Alexander gave voice to the migrant communities with shared endeavors in acknowledging the affluence of cultural diversity.

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