



Depiction of Mental Health and Illness in Literature : Comparative Studies of Different Literary Period and Genres



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ABSTRACT

Mental health is a state of well-being which helps people to cope up with stress and make them realise their abilities, builds decisive power and helps in learning well. In today's time it can be considered as one of the main reasons leading to the disturbed life especially in youngsters. And normally we can see that at one point or another point, if not all of us, then most of us have dealt with these mental health issues, anxiety and physical problems as well. It can be anything like career, concern for parents, families, settlement, competitive spirit, environment, love-life, relatives. Anything that leads to the disturbance of our mind's stability is going to create a disturbed place one day or the other in our mind. These same issues have been portrayed in many works of literature as well which portrays mental

health and physical health issues. For illustration we can take example of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wallpaper(1892) , Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar, Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Grey, John Corey Whaley's Highly Illogical Behaviour, John Green's Turtles all the way down. These are only some of the examples of the novels which portray the mental health problems. In this way, the research paper specifically aims to jot down the perspectives towards the instability of mind through the comparative studies in literature and common factors faced in day to day lives.

KEYWORDS

Mental Health, Physical well-being, Effect of Mental Health, Leading factors of Mental Health, Literary viewpoints on Mental Issues



RESEARCH PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Mental Health is the emerging topic particularly more after the pandemic. It is not like that before that no one had experienced it. Everyone in their life would have experienced this kind of feeling, feeling left out and of utmost pressure over their shoulder. But why is it the main centre of attraction nowadays? One of the reasons can be that now everybody is so free because of the increased technology that they have no busy schedule regarding work. But they are so occupied with their mobile activities that they are under continuous pressure of being liked by everyone resulting in the damage of their mind and mind-set too. Of all the people, specifically youngsters, struggling with mental issues, depression and anxiety, the common factor that can be seen is because they are in their teen years. During teen years there are various things which they go through all at sudden like it is their adulting, their choices in the career related their subject decision in boards then at the same time the attraction towards opposite gender, hormonal imbalance, rejection in certain area and then dealing with them all alone, having zero to no friends, the urge to be best among all, these all are the small issues which creates havoc later when paid no attention the similar things are portrayed in various literary works.

Although characters taken from the Victorian ones regarding mental illness are mostly either clueless or having most of their works aligned with their over-thinking skills. Starting from “turtles all the way down” by John Green, it is a story about a teenage girl through which it gets very clear how it feels to live in anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder. The story revolves around a girl, Aza, who tries to solve the mystery of a billionaire. The author John Green explains that he has written down Aza’s character because he had also suffered this way and this feeling of suffering can’t be explained directly. That’s why he chose Aza to be a character who can explain his thoughts.



In many of the works mental illness have been portrayed negatively. On the other hand, in some works mental illness have been illustrated authentically however indirectly they revealed how ignorant society and family friends can become which is a lot more like real life. The next we can discuss is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* which is a perfect match of mental illness and ignorance allied with the 19th century. In this piece of work which deals with a woman suffering from postpartum depression. Her husband John, who being a physician rejects narrator's concern saying the "false and foolish fancies". According to John, she should just rest all day until the illness passes by. Otherwise being a physician it could be expected from him to be gentle towards her available to her whenever she needs him. In this novella the behaviour of her husband and the society around her shows the ignorant nature and unawareness towards sensitive topics like postpartum depression. In that sense we can praise the present day's technology which made it so open that now anyone and everyone knows about these types of things which were quite unknown by normal people at their time. Consequently, females had to suffer more due to their negligence.

In the next work which is "the picture of Dorian Grey" by Oscar Wilde, this mental illness has been portrayed in the figure of ugly self-portrait. This is the same concept which we talked about: how becoming the best from all of the rest, makes it a very pressurising thing to the mind. We see how his inner self changes form but his physical body remains the same. It is so because the inner self deteriorates over time which is directly proportional to the mind's health. As his mind gets so equipped with these things it starts losing his pure essence and loses its peace.

"The Bell Jar" by Sylvia Plath is about Esther's life. Esther is the main protagonist. She was suffering from mental issues. She had a boyfriend in the college who used to get married with her but in college time when he gets to know that she was suffering from mental illness, he shows repulsion towards her as at that time it was considered such a stigma. On the other hand, if we see the state of his boyfriend, he was also admitted to the hospital because he was suffering from tuberculosis. Irrespective of this fact he says to Esther that who are you going to marry now, showing the sense of undesirableness just because she was suffering from some mental illness which was a long time ago. This shows that physical illness is considered



normal but mental illness is taken as something like a stigma to the person. This can become one of the examples of how society treats mentally disturbed persons, not with love but with undesirableness.

According to a survey, mental health and mental disorders are the most commonly identified problems in state and local places. In addition to that, suicide cases are also more in males than females which can be considered as the main reason of poverty in rural areas because the number of deaths are more in rural than in urban areas. Mental illness is a chronic disease and once in a lifetime, every other person faces this. For more explanation, it can be further divided into two parts; one is SMI (Serious Mental Illness) which is caused to the person above aged 18 and affects the decisive power of the person and the other is SED (Serious Emotional Disturbance) which is caused from birth and affects the child's relation with family, friends and his/her participation in any of the cultural activities. This is the general distinction between two things, other than that if we start considering the disorders then there is a long list of mental problems which is not acknowledged by various people. Talking about the numbers, approximately 20 percent of children and adolescents suffer from mental problems and this number is increasing, there is not even a stability point. 5% of children suffer from functional impairment. And it is under a report that states that people around age 15-24 don't receive any medical treatment. A lack of awareness and perceived social stigma becomes the main reason for the lack of treatment.

Sadly, this is a common mistake that has been there for a very long time. For people who have little to no knowledge regarding these mental illnesses, it can prove to be a very difficult and tiring process for them. As those people who know nothing about it then it is like a disaster to their own mind. However, symptoms are more obvious like sadness, continuous urge to cry, feeling suffocated, not feeling happy & satisfied by the heart but it can be cured by being little more generous towards each other even when one doesn't know the problem of others. This is the small step that can be initiated to be a giving hand to nature and society. Mental disorders increase the risk of communicable and non-communicable diseases and wanted and unwanted injury. Most people don't understand the concept of connectedness of mental health to the other parts of the body. Conversely the relation of body parts to mental health. But despite its



connection to each other, they are treated differently. Their forms of treatment are different from each other. Physical illness can be treated with some precautions and antibiotics but for mental health it is compulsory to provide the needed environment to the patient for speedy recovery.

The literary works have dealt with this genre through various works and papers .and there are significant ways in which these characters have been portrayed like the above mentioned characters. But sometimes there is a slight difference between reel and real. The same thing is underlined here that in case of disease and illness there is nothing like a slight line between reel and real. Everything falls under the same place in this genre and the adversity of it can be experienced either by ourselves or through some visionary work like movies/series or by any part of fiction in which words pay justice to the intensity of the work.

CONCLUSION

To be more specific, with increased limelight on this topic of mental illness which for a long time had been considered as a taboo, the pandemic, socialisation and technologies had made people to be more aware of their mental health and these things also led to the open opportunities to seek help and respite professionally. No doubt why we can see everywhere psychiatrist. The more aware surroundings and environment, if provided to the human beings then the desired results can be seen effectively. It is all about the empathetic nature required to be a potential listener to one another. The future is more bound to be seen as depressed and full of anxiety, analysing all of the surroundings and capabilities in today's time. We can deal with it more prominently if we are fully aware about it beforehand, like being there with friends and family when they need and being aware about the situations one is having. It is a co-operative process, not a single hand thing. If today everyone is going to take it as one of their main responsibilities, only then the upcoming future generation can be secured, perhaps no more place will be needed for depression, anxiety and mental health problems.



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The primary resource of this article is the main novels of discussed works and the secondary resources are online available resources on Google and articles published in journals.

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