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EXPLORING THE ELEMENTS OF HEALTH HUMANITIES IN SHREEVATSA NEVATIA'S *HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT: MY MEMORIES OF MADNESS AND MELANCHOLIA*

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of Enlightenment, Marxism, Neoliberalism, Materialism, Capitalism and the apocalyptic wars the *zeitgeist* of human existence has undergone some serious transformations. This change has resulted is loss of human values and harmony which used to be the crucial cornerstones of the civilizations preceding ours. Amid these transformations, doctor-patient relationship has also turned grimy. In the contemporary times, hospitals and medical practitioners are seen to succumb under the neoliberal and pharmaceutical pressures which primarily drive their energies towards profit maximization. This has further led to loss in harmony, integrity, and shift in doctor-patient values, roles and cultures. The present research aims to analyze the elements of disease, diagnosis, treatment and caregiving which form a crucial rubric in the discipline of Health Humanities. Under the critical light of these elements in Health Humanities, Shreevatsa Nevatia's *How to Travel Light: My Memories of Madness and Melancholia* (2017) has been examined. The study applies the tools of narrative, storytelling, auto-mythology, and personhood in the text which are essential for restoring the health, harmony and well-being of the patients.

Disease is the will speaking through the body, a language for dramatizing the mental: a form of self-expression. Groddeck described illness as "a symbol, a representation of something going on within, a drama staged by the It. . . ." (*Illness as metaphor*, Susan Sontag, 44)

David Healy in his *Mania: A short history of bipolar disorder* (2011) expounds mania and melancholy have a long lineage. Since classical antiquity, doctors have reported unsettling and occasionally incapacitating affect levels, with some women and men experiencing episodic excitement and others experiencing unnatural depression. A time- and place-specific arrangement of concepts, behaviors, and institutions makes up the social entity that is bipolar illness. Our world produces that conceptual entity—and consequently lived reality—in a strange way. In this world, our perspective on illness is dominated by reductionist ideas about illness. It is a realm of psychopharmaceutical practice and bureaucratic classifications. The achievements of the laboratory have contributed to the creation of this world, but it is also a social one that has been influenced by government laws, corporate plans, advertising, and the media. In Shreevatsa Nevatia's *How to Travel Light: My Memories of Madness and Melancholia* (2017) the bipolar afflicted narrator's disease seems to be a cumulative product of his socio-cultural surroundings and his doctor takes on the task of working with him for the purpose of restoring his well-being and exhibiting the fine qualities of doctor-patient relationship which is a strong call in the field of Health Humanities. In the novel,

'We live in a state of mystics. The experience you describe certainly does have precedents, but this illumination can sometimes make us forget that we have to continue living in a society, that there are people we are responsible for, there are parents who care for us…Shreevatsa, I need you to acknowledge a single fact. At this point, you are high. This fact doesn't discount anything you have seen or come to know, but you have to bring yourself down a few notches, and you need to do this for yourself and the people around you.' (197)

In his *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and Ethics* (2013), Arthur W. Frank expresses amazement at what drives someone like Alsop, Radner, or Broyard to devote their last months of life and their remaining vitality to writing about sickness. These people had other options for entertainment or companionship, yet they decided to write instead. Why did Lorde spend so much time writing right after having a mastectomy? According to the tautological reaction, the dyadic body's goal is to connect with others; it wants to affect them and perhaps have an impact on the way their stories are recounted. In addition to a medical cure, the goal is to strengthen the human mind and body's innate desire for perfectibility and regeneration. Perhaps the wisest use of human liberty is to preserve and honor such innate yearning. Through auto-mythology, a tool of narrative, physicians can encourage their patients to transform their specific illnesses into a paradigm of common suffering and hardships. In the novel,

Despite the hubbub of his waiting room, Dr Mukherjee has always taken three-quarters of an hour out of his schedule to talk to me about my work, the tumult of my romantic relationships and the new books I have bought for my shelves…Every three months, my blood is tested to gauge the level of lithium in my body. But more than my blood work, it is in language that he has found symptoms make themselves apparent.' (214)

Francis Weld Peabody in his *The Care of the Patient* (1927) discerns when a patient visits a doctor, he typically has faith that the doctor is the best, or at least the best person, to assist him with what is currently his biggest problem. He depends on him as much as he does on a knowledgeable, experienced counselor. In every case of organic disease, there are intricate interactions between the pathologic and intellectual processes that the physician must recognize and take into account in order to be a wise clinician. The diagnosis and treatment of any patient whose symptoms have a functional origin hinge on his understanding of the patient's personality and personal life. When a patient is seriously ill, the doctor will only consider the illness and how to treat it; but, once the situation has improved and the immediate crisis has passed, he must focus on the patient. Human sickness is never quite the same as that of an experimental animal since in humans, the disease immediately affects and is influenced by what is known as the emotional life. Therefore, a doctor who tries to treat a patient while ignoring this aspect is just as unscientific as an investigator who fails to control for every possible influence on his experiment. A good doctor has a deep understanding of his patients and is highly valued for his expertise. Spending a lot of time, empathy, and understanding is necessary, but the pleasure lies in the human connection that makes practicing medicine the most fulfilling. Interest in people is one of the most important traits of a doctor since caring for the patient is the only key to patient care. In the novel, the narrator's physician provides him with best

possible disease description, treatment and caregiving which helps significantly in providing him with confidence and restoring his well-being. The physician is able to follow the steps of disease, diagnosis, treatment and caregiving in an orderly manner which makes him earn the trust of his patients.

For the first time, I felt I was making sense of my recent tumult. 'I don't know how it happened, but suddenly I began to perceive all forms of injustice in the world. And then I understood that the world had been very unfair to me. Was it fair that I'd been abused continuously for four years as a child? I admit I felt some of that humiliation belatedly, but doesn't my cousin Satyah deserve a comeuppance?'…Patting my hand, Dr Joshi added, 'The aim is to get you back on your feet, to come to a point when all that happened does not matter anymore.' (186-7)

Craig Klugman and Erin Gentry Lamb in their *Research Methods in Health Humanities* (2019) communicate that in order to produce informed and compassionate healthcare professionals, patients, and family caregivers, the health humanities aims to comprehend the human condition of health and illness. It uses methods from the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts to give meaning, understanding, and insight to those who are dealing with sickness, including patients, healthcare professionals, legislators, and those who are interested in human suffering. *Health Humanities Reader* (2014) edited by Therese Jones, Delese Wear and Lester Friedman propounds the ability of literature—not just poetry—and other products of creative cultural production to preserve and improve human well-being. According to Kenneth Burke as well, literature may both nurse us with an allopathic approach to healing and immunize us by stylistically infecting us with the sickness. Scholars in the health humanities apply this understanding of the healing and immunizing potential of literature to the practice of medicine. They believe that literature is an essential supplement to science and evidence-based medicine. In addition to protecting and curing the soul, literature and the arts also produce the insights that are a vital social supplement to medicine, a way to go beyond therapy to healing.

In conclusion, this research analyses Shreevatsa Nevatia's *How to Travel Light: My Memories of Madness and Melancholia* (2017) through the spectrum of Health Humanities. The various elements of disease, diagnosis, treatment and caregiving have been examined in Nevatia's work in order to conduct the study. Several tools used in Health Humanities like Narrative, Auto-mythology, and Personhood have been explored which help in enhancing the doctor-patient relationship and restoring the well-being of patients. Francis Weld Peabody's idea of caregiving forms a crucial component of the paper wherein he motivates the physicians to take proper case histories of their patients by listening to them efficiently. He further guides them by expressing that half the workload of physician reduces if he diagnoses the patient with patience and empathy. The steps of treatment and caregiving preceding afterwards become complementary leading to a strong doctor-patient relationship and building the physician's institutional reputation. He would become a wise physician if follows all the steps correctly which form an essential component of clinical procedure. As by doing this, the physician not just assists in restoring the health and well-being of his patients but become torchbearers for entire nations and communities.

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