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UNDEFEATED LIFE OF FEMALE WRITERS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

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Abstract

Over the time, various female writers have written works in literature as means of women authorization as they were aware of the variety of texts written by and for men. In making a room of their own with feminine writing and setting patriarchal boundaries aside, there have been times when their own mental health took a toll. Famous writers such as Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton committed suicide after been victims of mental illness. While there were others who confronted their mental illness through their writings. The attempt of this paper is to throw light on the life of female writers, their mental health and the acknowledgement their works receive. The paper may also works as an inspirational tool for those going though the illness and put emphasis on the fact that despite battling mental illness, works of female writers and poets live on eternally and inspire generations.

Keywords - mental health, mental illness, female writers

Introduction

Mental health is a term which is collectively used for our emotional, social and psychological well being. According to (WHO) mental health is described as a state of well being where a particular individual is able to realize his own abilities, is able to cope up with the stress of life, and is also able to make contribution in their community (1). Abe Askoff, highlighted that mental health is referred as persainaty trit of an individual affects the setting of which the person is a part of. He also stated that happiness and harmony are two qualities which are appreciated for a healthier mental health. He has also put emphasis on self, where it is important to self-love, self-care and self-regard (18). H.J. Eysenk

describd mental halth as a state where there is a cordial relationship between the environment and a particular person, thus resulting in a balance between he two (205). According to an article published in (Healthline, 2018) ways such as keeping a psitive attitude towards life, keeping physical fitness intact, being courteius towards others, getting enough sleep and eaithing healthy, socializing with people andand using skills to deal with problems (1). Although there have been mental health related issues in various sections of the society, women artists, especially writers and poets have suffered no less. In their lives and works, lies a history of mental illnesses and mental health which was a part of their creative conscience. Although

each sex has relation to mental illness or madness, it was somehow chained to feminism in the lives and works of female's writers and poets.

Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were few female writers who had something in common and that was mental illness. They depicted their narratives of mental illness with characters of their novels. Their protagonists suffered with anxiety, hallucinations, depression and insomnia. And the collection of all these illnesses is called psychosis.

"During a period of psychosis, a person's thoughts and perceptions are disturbed and the individual may have difficulty understanding what is real and what is not. Symptoms of psychosis include delusions (false beliefs) and hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that others do not see or hear). Other symptoms include incoherent or nonsense speech, and behaviour that is inappropriate for the situation. A person in a psychotic episode may also experience depression, anxiety, sleep problems, social withdrawal, lack of motivation, and difficulty functioning overall." (National Institute of Mental Health)

All the characteristics mentioned in the explanation above are clearly indicated in the life of these female writers as well. Although there are various reasons which lead to the growth of psychosis, it majorly begins with an experience or event of trauma which arises in everyday life. If a proper treatment is given in the very start then there comes a cure for the same otherwise it keeps on getting worse and ultimately harms the individual in the end.

In the book *The Bell Jar*, there has been references as well as a detailed account of various indications rising due to psychosis. The protagonist is vocal about her depression from the early age of 14 years. She said that the silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence but it was my own silence (Plath 20). Further, she adds, "I couldn't see the point of getting up. I had nothing to look forward to" (Plath 123). She was not even able to do even basic chores like cleaning her own clothes. She writes ". "The reason I hadn't washed my clothes or my hair was because it seemed so silly.... It seemed

silly to wash one day when I would only have to wash again the next. It made me tired just to think of it. I wanted to do everything once and for all and be through with it" (Plath 135). All these behavioural activities of her lead her towards making several suicide attempts.

The following have been few pre-dominant reason because of which mental illness became a leading cause in the life of female writers:

- Gender oppression
- Lack of freedom
- Marriage and children

Many of the best-loved female writers have agonized from mental illnesses. In fact, their sorrow has often been as much of a draw as their actual, take, for instance, the case of Sylvia Plath, and the huge attention and captivation nearby her suicide. This is luckily becoming less and less the case as mental diseases gradually stop to be a taboo, famous female writers can talk fairly and openly about their mental health without it overriding their work. There are lots of wrong ways to talk about hugely talented female writers who also happen to have mental health questions. VICE magazine once shaped a hugely contentious photo reporting for their Females in Fabrication Issue. A style spread used replicas to portray seven feminine writers who had dedicated or endeavoured suicide. The photos re-formed those events where Sylvia Plath is observing into a fume oven for example – and the only arguments were the style praises and a few particulars about the writer's death. Their narratives, poems, letters were all unspecified. It is too inquisitive just to go through the profiles of female novelists with mental well-being issues, and weakens their work. It seems a lot more suitable to look at how the writers themselves discover and use their mental disease in their artistic effort, so here are a minority.

How females have represented themselves in literature

Ever since the beginning of women's liberation, which started in the 19th century and got its highest point in 20th century, a lot of literature came into being which was written by female

writers. The works talked about liberation of women, their revolts and equality. Women articulated their own views about their lives, instances and experiences. A new wave of feminism in 80's ignited the works of female writers. Greater emphasis was put on gender, faith and marginalism.

Writings of female auto biographers who were victims of mental illness.

Virginia Woolf

Moments of Being is an assortment by Virginia Woolf that gives first-person stories. Woolf was one writer who altered the world of English literature by providing an image of her own life over her works. Women autobiography was not give much attention in earlier days but Woolf changed the notion. She herself was fond of reading autobiographies and writing autobiography was in her genes. The tradition of feminine autobiographies was made famous by Woolf herself.

An account named *Reminiscences* in 1907 was mentioned as her period of traineeship. It talks about the doubts of Woolf where Woolf was being a skilled person in her chosen field of writing.

Printed in 1939, *A Sketch of the Past* talked about her association with her sisters, father and mother. The book talks about how Woolf dealt with her family and environments with adulthood.

Am I A Snob written in 1930's was printed when Woolf was at the top of her career. She altered herself from the world of Victorian agreement to the world of intelligence. The work is a work of introspection where she equivalences herself with other in order to know if she is a name-dropper.

Sylvia Plath

It might be somewhat problematic to understand but Plath wrote some her most well-known works, majorly her rhyme during the periods when she was going over despair. She gave voice to an overall new style of literature, known as confessional poetry where she came out about failing mental health in her work. There she used individual feelings and involvements of her life where her hours would comprise of lack of sleep, getting up early, and writing beforehand her

children would get up and came out with a vivid work *Ariel*. Her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, is semi-autobiographical fiction, taking many events from her own life, counting her depression, suicide attempt, and the electro-convulsive therapy she was managed as a theoretical cure for her mental health matters. Among her friends and classmates, Plath was known for having recurrent mood swings, thoughtless nature, and rash behaviour. It was said that after any refusal or disappointment, she used to go in a state of sadness. Her works, precisely her poetry dealt with such conduct, dysfunctional actions, suicide, etc. These were the involvements, felt by her first handily. Following is the list of her works:

1. *Ariel*
2. *Crossing the Water*
3. *Winter Trees*
4. *The Bed Book*
5. *Tulips*

Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson was an American poet, recognized for her isolated life. Never being identified with a mental illness, it was mainly by memories, her letters and her poetry that literary critics and commenter have inferred that she had mental health issues. The melodies of demise, illness and unhappiness do appear regularly in her poetry, though as a keen phytologist, she also inscribes often of flowers and gardens, as well as the interior life between a varieties of other topics. Following is the list of her works:

1. I'm Nobody! Who are you?
2. Final Harvest
3. Open Me Carefully

Conclusion

As early as the seventeenth century, the files of the Dr. Richard Napier presented nearly twice as many cases of mental disorder amongst his women patients as amongst men. Women continued to be mainly the patients of community lunatic sanctuaries in the nineteenth century. Today,

females are the mainstream of patients in psychotherapy and psychiatric hospitals and outpatient mental health clinics. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, ten million more women than men in the U.S. suffer from a mental illness. Details for this are extremely multifaceted. Feminist dissertation concerning the historical and political suppression, social prospects and resulting illness of women is see-through, disturbing, and speaks for itself. Women have been and endure to be located as "other" and labelled as different when they do not pledge to socially built ideas of femaleness within the social order. Additionally, it is clear that through history, feminine mental illness can be measured at some level an act of revolt. Domination and defeat of women is, simply put, built into the fabric of our society. Today, according to the standards, a woman who is mentally healthy confines her sexuality, is not violent, but also is not dependent on others. These arrangements limit and define women's conduct by medical diagnoses today, just as they did eras ago. As gender begins to be recognized as a social and enlightening concept rather than of biological willpower, social procedures that shape the ideas of maleness and femaleness should become less organized. This will significantly affect how we view and treat women precisely and mental health overall. Representations in widespread culture that focus on regularizing, accurate depictions will help in this effort. Rather than teach the public on this thoughtful issue, madness figures cancel and produce bigotry and stigmatization. In the end, there can be no humble response to the query of women's mental health, but their discomfort is very real and in deliberation we must attend to what they have to say and admit their works, literatures and life as well.

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