New Research in English Studies

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INTRODUCTION

In their pioneering meta-disciplinary work *Creative Marginality: Innovation at the Intersections of Social Sciences* Mattei Dogan and Robert Pahre claim that "scientific specialization brings about the fragmentation of disciplines into narrow subfields….as specialization reaches its natural limits, innovative scholars will seek to recombine these fragments into hybrid fields." The collection of essays in the present volume, titled *New Research in English Studies***,** illustrate the super-specialization as well as recombination of the subfields in new humanities. The book is a product of a three-day International Young Researchers' Conference which was held from 26 to 28 April, 2023 at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. The theme of the Conference, "New Research in English Studies" was chosen with the broad objective of showcasing new research in English Studies, and facilitating critically-informed discussions on recent trends in English Studies.

The cross-pollination of ideas that define the new research trends in English Studies merit sharing with a wider audience, comprising teachers, researchers and students in the nonmetropolitan centres. The specific aim of this collection is to bring together emergent research questions at the interstices of the studies on memory, trauma, nature-human connections, migration, marginality, art, identity, representation, culture, films, politics and posthumanism.

Some of the key concerns of the book are:

- To map new research in English Studies and facilitate interaction between researchers on the innovative paradigms and new dimensions in the field of English Studies.
- To facilitate exchange of ideas among scholars engaged in various exciting research projects across institutions in India and South Asia.
- To initiate the formation of an intellectual / scholarly network of new research in the global south.

New Research in English Studies has initiated a dialogue about human problems, experiences, and challenges to make us understand the world better. It urges the discipline to rethink its relationship with other disci-

plines in humanities and social sciences. It also has inspired the universities to offer new courses: feminist studies, subaltern studies, dalit literature, dalit literary studies, tribal literature, literatures from the margins, disability studies, medical humanities, memory studies, trauma studies, digital humanities, auto/biography studies, life writing /studies, African-American studies, literature and cultures, blue humanities, transcultural studies, performance studies, childhood studies, critical post-humanities, art and aesthetics, graphic narratives, translation studies, feminist translation studies, cultures of translation, language, literature, media and culture, comparative literature, decoloniality, Indian literature, world literature, queer studies, masculinity studies and the list goes on, each sub-field creating a space for new voices in literary studies. A book project such as this will hopefully open up an active channel of discussion between these various disciplines and suggest ways of bridging the gap between the world and the classroom. As David Johnson argues, literary research needs openness to other disciplines, and "[I]nterdisciplinary study allows unprecedented scope for posing new questions and it enables the pursuit of individual research interests in ways that were inconceivable 30 years ago."[1]

English Studies has been incorporating theoretical frameworks from feminist studies, cultural studies, subaltern studies, and other disciplines due to contemporary social, art, and cultural movements. Scholars are raising new questions on human challenges and problems. Researchers are studying texts and literature in the light of historical, social, cultural, political contexts and ideologies. Research in English Studies, in a way, is shaping the way the academy thinks, and understands the world around us. Historically, English literature departments were only involved in research on literary texts; however, contemporary understanding of the text has been transformed – text now includes films, oral narratives, art, and graphic narratives. In tune with these developments, it is hoped that young scholars would appreciate help with their attempt to pursue research in their areas of interest and welcome any help with critical engagement with literary and non-literary materials.

New Research in English Studies is asking critical questions and responding to the contemporary issues and problems that the world is facing. In the process, the discipline is bringing together literary theory, practice, performance, activism, archiving and research. The need of the hour is to understand the world from the perspective and experiences of every

[1] Johnson, David. "Literary research and interdisciplinarity". The Handbook to Literary Research, edited by Delia da Sousa Correa and W. R. Owens, 131-147. (Abingdon: Routledge in association with the Open University, 2010).

human being. There is no single overarching method or approach to understand the human experience and the world. A holistic approach alone can help understand the full spectrum of human experience. Literary studies becomes relevant insofar as it underscores tolerance, humility, empathy, dialogue, and respect for the perspectives of 'others' as a way of life. It is time for us to move on from singular and authoritarian intellectual positions towards plural and discursive practices. This is not just an ethical imperative but an epistemological one too, to include the experiences of others who have been left out of theoretical and intellectual debates. Researchers need to learn the method of listening to others who have a different ideology, experience and perspective. Such a stance, which encourages human interaction and engagement alone can challenge obstacles to intellectual growth by facilitating dialogue across 'knowledge systems' and disciplines.

The book is part of the attempt to begin a conversation against biases, and stereotypes based on race, caste, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. The differences and diversity of human experiences need to be understood and celebrated; we need to encourage people and societies to embrace difference and diversity, where people from different cultures, and communities treat each 'other' with respect and kindness and create a harmonious, inclusive and just world.

The book has taken the interdisciplinary route to analyse the identity, culture and representation of humans at the local and global levels. It opens up a truly interdisciplinary perspective on English Studies, born out of the postmodern conviction on the radically altered relation between the narrative and its other. The book is divided into six research areas: Memory and Trauma Studies, Narrating and Theorising Nature-Human Connections, Film Studies, Identity, Representation, Culture and Politics, Minority Discourse: New Approaches, and Critical Post-Humanities. Each chapter selected in this book explores a new theme, has a critical orientation and an innovative method of enquiry. The topic/areas the chapters deal with have been sorted in their intellectual context by means of a critical introduction to the ideas and movements.

The first part of the book consists of four chapters. It looks at the emerging field of Memory and Trauma Studies. It includes chapters on gastronomic culture and trauma, human experiences of addiction and recovery, politics of isolation and exclusion, and construction of self and emptiness. In chapter 1, Kurchika Nath examines the historical, cultural constructs of widowhood, and discrimination in the kitchen, and explores how caste, class, and motherhood affect widows' lives in two Bengali films *Chokher Bali* (2003) and *Goynar Baksho* (2013). The chapter dis-

cusses the marginalization of widows within Bengali society through an analysis of gastronomic culture. Chapter 2 by B. L. Jayadev, critically analyses the human experiences of addiction and recovery through the lens of health humanities and narrative medicine. The chapter underlines the importance of listening to and understanding stories of patients in the context of the impact of addiction on families. In chapter 3, Shobha Elizabeth John discusses the questions of remembering and aging with reference to the imposed erasure or oblivion imposed by hegemonic powers through the novels *The Buried Giant* (2015) and *The Memory Police* (1994). The chapter suggests body as a site onto which the burden of memory, intergenerational ties, politics of erasure, and forgetfulness can be mapped in the context of understanding ageing as a biological, psychological, and cultural experience. In chapter 4, Archa Singh explores the concept of emptiness in Buddhist philosophy to understand the dialectic between selfhood and faith. The chapter argues that the dialectic between diverse expressions and representations in the life narratives of Buddhist nuns problematizes any one way of interpreting women's spirituality and selfhood, and foregrounds a self that is, paradoxically, relational, impermanent, and "empty."

The second part of the book is on Narrating and Theorising Nature-Human Connections. It consists of chapters on blue humanities, the politics of the Anthropocene and the folksongs of the Ho tribe of Jharkhand. In chapter 5, Shahrukh Khan offers a critique of the unacknowledged spatiality of ocean and its representation in literature through the framework of blue humanities and blue ecocriticism. This chapter suggests Blue ecocriticism as a counter discourse that warns us against the degradation of oceans and water bodies, which will result in the gradual sinking of several cities. In chapter 6, Jyoti Rani discusses folk songs of the Ho tribe of Jharkhand, who look at nature as a living being with its own spirit and consciousness, from a neo-colonialist and ecofeminist perspective. The author analyses Ho Tribe's symbiotic relationship with their natural world, exploitation of the tribal environment by Non-Tribals, growing degradation of the environment, and extinction of flora and fauna. In chapter 7, Ankita Sharma explores the tribal way of living, philosophy of coexistence, and relationships between humans and nature through the lens of third-world environmentalism. The chapter discusses the conflict between the mystical voices of the forests and consumerism, and analyses forest as a site of socio-cultural-economic-political significance.

The third part of the book is on Identity, Representation, Culture and Politics. This part consists of chapters on Muslim detectives, childhood geography, Modern British women translators, minority writing and

British South Asian migrant theatre. In chapter 8, Zainab Abrar examines how detective fiction is used to reinforce stereotypes of certain ethnicities, religions, races, and genders. The chapter explores characters that challenge stereotypes and offer a more nuanced portrayal of Muslim communities, highlighting their complexity and diversity in contemporary Anglophone detective fiction. In chapter 9, Amrita Das maps childhood geographies of 'otherness' through a close reading of *The Librarian of Auschwitz*. The chapter explores a child's engagement with adult-constructed spaces, creating an identity through their interaction with these spaces which allows the child to exercise their agency as an act of empowerment. In chapter 10, Anastasia Parise re-evaluates early modern British female translators' contribution to both translation practice and theory. The chapter renegotiates women's place in translation history and discusses how translation has been a significant means through which women could take part in cultural production and contemporary debates. In chapter 11, Harshita Tiwari explores the characteristics of minority writing, in particular the language of identity politics through thing theory. The chapter demonstrates how and where, when objects come in contact with different subjects, they change meaning. In chapter 12, Irram Irfan analyses how migrant communities in Britain used theatre as a space to resist stereotyping, racial profiling and acculturation of migrant cultures with the objective of creating a cultural visibility and identity for themselves. The chapter discusses how migrant theatres enacted plural nationalities which redefined the concepts of 'migrant nationality' and 'migrant citizenship' which lead to the acceptance and integration of migrant communities in British society.

The fourth part of the book is on new themes in the area of Film Studies. It analyses the Tamil Cinema of the 1970s, films on children of Kashmir, representation of maternal subjectivity in films, and critiques the ways in which women's film history has been previously written. In chapter 13, Swarnavel Eswaran explores Arumugham Rudraiah's iconic Tamil film *Aval Appadithaan* (That's the Way She Is!, 1977) and *Agraharathil Kazhudhai* (Donkey in a Brahmin Enclave, 1978) to understand how cinematic techniques are exploited for thematic articulation in 1970s Tamil cinema. The chapter demonstrates how Zoom lens is used to punctuate emotions and to explore narrow spaces, subconscious of the casteist village, mysteries of the community, and to provide a dynamic visual experience. In chapter 14, Rashida Muneer critically analyses the maternal subjectivity depicted in *Salaam Venky* and questions the glorification of motherhood in the Indian context. The chapter suggests the necessity of normalizing the portrayal of mothers that encompasses healthy maternal

ambivalence, ensuring their mental and physical well-being. In chapter 15, Aasif Amin offers insights into the failure of films in creating a nuanced and sensitive portrayal of the experiences of childhood. The chapter argues that filmmakers approach the subject with a narrow and limited perspective, 'a fractal gaze' in the context of representing the experiences of Kashmiri children. In chapter 16, Mydhily M. S analyses the methodological concerns in women's film history and self-narrative as a potential site to inquire about women's negotiations with the industrial and aesthetic practices of early cinema. The chapter examined the life stories of female film professionals through a feminist lens that challenges historians to reformulate questions of evidence, archives, and truth.

The fifth part of the book is about New Approaches in Minority Discourse. This part includes chapters on Dalit women autobiographies, Dalit art practice, Dalit childhood, Dalit voices in cyberspace and vulnerability of the 'Other' in a utopian or a dystopian world. In chapter 17, Priyanka Verma offers a critique on the failure of mainstream feminism in addressing the issues of Dalit women and the intersectionality of caste. The chapter demonstrates Dalit feminism as a powerful standpoint that highlights the unique social location, experiences, history of Dalit women and emphasizes the need to address caste-based discrimination and patriarchal oppression together. In chapter 18, Raj Shekhar Barman explores 'silence,' 'mainstream blockage' and 'humanization' throughout Indian art history on the question of caste and emergence of Dalit art practice through the work of Kirtika Kain and Rajyashri Goody. The chapter demonstrates how Dalit artists created a space for Dalit art in the mainstream art world by representing the community's history, anger, helplessness, suffering and resistance. In chapter 19, Maitri Verma explores psychological development of dalit children in contrast to that of *savarna* children through Perumal Murugan's *Seasons of the Palm*. The chapter demonstrates how the psychological development of the Dalit child is burdened with inferiority complex, worthlessness, lack of identity, untouchability, and helplessness, while an upper caste child enjoys superiority, power, purity, and pride. In chapter 20, Aditi Kulia examines how Dalits face discrimination on social media platforms and how biased media structures suppress Dalit voices from being heard on online platforms to narrate their stories. This chapter argues that social media, to an extent, empower Dalits but it also has become a space for promoting discrimination through caste-hate speech, trolling, and abuse. In chapter 21, Mohd. Raghibul Haque examines Khalid Tawfik's novel *Utopia* in the context of political dystopia through the lens of 'vulnerability', and 'intersectionality' and analyses the significance of challenging dominant norms

and values through building a subversive power of alliances and coalitions across different marginalized groups.

The last part of this book is about Critical Post-Humanities. This part includes chapters on critical aspects of posthumanism, posthuman rights, and locating the unconscious of Artificial Intelligence. In chapter 22, ‘Dipanjan Kundu explores philosophical aspects of posthumanism and offers a critique of patriarchal and ableist prejudices over the rights of the persons with disabilities in Mahesh Dattani’s play *Tara* and Indra Sinha’s novel *Animal’s People*. In chapter 23, Mahesh Krishna and Nagendra Kumar examine the question of posthuman rights and instrumentalization of posthuman bodies as embodied agents in *Dogs of War* (2017). In chapter 24, Zeenia Bhat explores the development of the unconscious of AI, and analyses how Klara, an AI in the novel transforms herself into an AF (Artificial Friend) thanks to the human-AI interactions, and engage in a self-identification process.

This book offers cross-pollination of ideas in English Studies and suggests ways of engaging with the modern typologies of popular/political psyche. Its inter and cross-disciplinary thrust aligns with the impact and objectives of the ambitious NEP (National Educational Policy), 2020, with its advocacy of an inclusive approach and re-think on the narrow, super-specialization plaguing current knowledge systems.

- Samson Thomas and Eligedi Rajkumar

CHAPTER 1

TRAUMA ON A PLATE: GASTRONOMIC MARGINALIZATION OF BENGALI HINDU WIDOWS

KURCHIKA NATH

Abstract

Akin to other Indian communities, the Bengali Hindu widow community is polylithic and divided along the lines of caste, class, and literacy. This paper explores the marginalization of widows through the lens of gastronomic culture as depicted in two Bengali films- *Chokher Bali* (2003) and *Goynar Baksho* (2013). It analyzes the historical and cultural constructs of widowhood, examining how caste, class, education, age, and motherhood affect widows' lives. In Bengali Hindu society, widows faced discrimination in the kitchen, where dietary restrictions served as a means of exclusion and control. The study focuses at how, throughout a woman's widowhood, food becomes intertwined with individual agency, societal expectations, and internalized oppression. It highlights the multifaceted relationship that exists between food, desire, and shame and demonstrates how widows' experiences of pain and scarcity are exacerbated by societal norms. By analyzing how widows are portrayed in these films, the paper uncovers the psychological and spatial divisions existent within the home, especially regarding the exclusion of widows from domains that are traditionally feminine, particularly the kitchen. The importance of food as a memory and indicator of identity is addressed focusing on how widows are absent from narratives of abundance and nourishment. The research concludes by highlighting the complex relationship between religious customs, colonial rule, and social norms which influenced dictums regarding widowhood in Bengal.

Keywords: Bengali Widowhood, Gastronomic Oppression, Cultural Trauma, Feminine Spatial Dynamics, Dietary Restrictions

Gender roles were defined during the Bengal Renaissance of the 19th century, primarily through the treatment of women according to their marital status. The classification of women into categories such as *sadhava* (women whose husbands were alive) and *bidhava* (widows) was not only socially constructed but also had political implications, reinforcing the marginalization of widows who lacked a guardian figure, inheritance, or income (Ghosh 2000, 1152). While the roles of *sadhava* women and unmarried girls evolved during this time, the expectation for widows was to adhere to traditional norms, resigning themselves to lives of sacrifice and abstinence to maintain cultural and spiritual sanctity amidst colonial influences. The abolition of *Sati* in 1829 further altered the status of widows, preventing their immolation but also burdening either marital or natal families with their care. Widows, deprived of the protection and support traditionally provided by their husbands, were often relegated to performing arduous domestic tasks, including heavy household labor (Ghosh 2000, 1152).

Of particular interest is the discrimination widows faced within the culinary sphere. The stigma of inauspiciousness associated with widowhood prohibited their entry into the kitchen, a domain traditionally associated with female authority within the household. The kitchen is a nexus where intergenerational female power dynamics and social and cultural subjectivities converge, influencing the dynamics within Hindu domestic spaces. Women, while wielding control by providing food for their families, simultaneously occupy subordinate positions within the household. The preparation and consumption of food in the Bengali Hindu households, akin to most other patriarchal societal setups, also reflect entrenched gender roles and social hierarchies. Women's agency is expressed through cooking, yet they often occupy subordinate positions within familial and societal structures (Counihan 2003, 4). Denied access to nutritious meals and dressed differently than other women of the household, widows were expected to adhere to strict dietary and behavioral codes, including fasting and leading a devout life, regardless of their age or education. Uma Chakravarti discusses widowhood as a state of social death among upper-caste Hindu women. She explains that widowhood leads to the alienation of women from reproduction and sexuality after the loss of their husbands, resulting in their exclusion from the family unit and societal roles. Once a woman transitions from wife to widow, she loses her social identity and becomes neither a daughter nor a daughter-in-law. This situation poses a challenge within Brahmanical patriarchy as to how to incorporate widows into society, given their social death but continued existence as members of the community (Chakravarti 1995, 2248).

This paper seeks to investigate the marginalization of widows within Bengali society through an analysis of gastronomic culture as depicted in two films: *Chokher Bali* (2003) and *Goynar Baksho* (2013). Widows in Bengali Hindu society do not constitute a homogeneous group; somewhat, their experiences are shaped by factors such as caste, class, education, age, and motherhood. By critically analyzing these films, this study aims to discern whether such factors influence the perception of gastronomic violence experienced by widows. Furthermore, this paper endeavors to explore the core and collective memories of trauma stemming from this violence and its profound impact on the psyche of widows. By examining the representation of widows' gastronomic practices and the cultural attitudes toward widowhood depicted in these films, we can gain insight into broader societal norms and attitudes toward marginalized groups. The acceptance or rejection of these dietary norms among widows in late 19th and early 20th century Bengal serves as a focal point for this paper, highlighting the intersection of cultural expectations, gender roles, and personal agency. The study aims to review existing literature and scholarly works on widowhood in Bengal to examine the representation of widows in films and the intersection of food, culture, and identity. By synthesizing these works with the analysis of *Chokher Bali* and *Goynar Baksho*, this paper aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of widowhood and gastronomic culture in Bengali society.

Vegetarianism in Bengal generally diverges significantly from pan-Indian vegetarianism, as it is predominantly linked not to caste or religion but rather to the marital status of individuals, particularly widows. It is important to note here that vegetarianism was the norm among men and women, married or widowed alike, among the *Vaishnavas* of Bengal (a sect in Hinduism devoted to worshipping Lord Vishnu). Consequently, the gastronomic traditions associated with widowhood are particularly pronounced among Bengali Hindu widows. Upon widowhood, a woman undergoes a transformation, symbolized by the removal of traditional markers of marriage—vermilion at the parting of her hair, white conch shell and red coral bangles, and the traditional iron bangle—often accompanied by compulsory tonsure and having to wear a plain white *saree* as opposed to a colorful one with borders. Furthermore, she is expected to adhere to a prescribed dietary regimen tailored specifically for widows. In this cultural context, the diversity among widows might become crucial, with factors such as caste, class, age, motherhood, and education impacting their dietary practices and the rigor with which they adhere to them. The prevalence of *Kulin* (a community of high-ranking Brahmins) polygamy in Bengal resulted in a significant population of widows, some widowed at a

pre-pubescent age due to the custom of child marriage. Malvika Karlekar highlights the hypergamous culture wherein young girls were often married off to older *Kulin* men, reflecting societal pressures to mitigate the perceived shame of having unmarried daughters (Karlekar 1995, 4). The socio-religious landscape of Bengal further complicates the situation, with practices like *Kulin* polygamy exacerbating the number of widows left without adequate support following the abolition of sati. Partha Chatterjee's analysis of colonialism and nationalism underscores the significance of the domestic sphere, symbolized by the concept of *ghar-bahir* (home and the world), as a site of resistance against colonial imposition. Chatterjee argues that preserving traditional gender roles within the home maintained cultural integrity in the face of external influence (Chatterjee 1989, 624). Within this context, the "New Bengali woman" figure emerges as a symbol of societal change, albeit constrained by the parameters of traditional values. Chatterjee contrasts this ideal with lower-class women who defy social norms, highlighting the dichotomy between the aspirational "new" woman and those who inhabit the public sphere in defiance of societal expectations (Chatterjee 1989, 627). However, the emphasis on education and moral superiority placed upon the "New Women" stands in stark contrast to the marginalized status of widows, who represent a vestige of an unreformed past. Brahmin widows were subjected to stringent codes of conduct, likely intended to maintain notions of Brahmin purity and social superiority by curtailing the agency of the most vulnerable within their domestic hierarchy—the widows. Uma Chakravarti explains the stringent control over female sexuality, particularly in the case of widows, is essential for preserving the hierarchical caste order and preventing any subversion of the existing social and cultural norms (2251). She discusses that widows, especially in high-caste society, face challenges regarding their entitlement to food and resources after becoming widowed. Widows are often perceived as losing even the limited access to food and clothing they had as wives. Cultural values dictate a low food allocation to widows, expecting them to fast frequently and consume minimal food. In return for the maintenance they receive from male relatives, widows must provide labor, which is often overlooked and undervalued (2256). The dietary restrictions imposed on them cannot be merely characterized as vegetarian, as this overlooks the severity of their gastronomic constraints. Hence, using the term widow's fare to capture the magnitude of the dietary regulations enforced upon them is imperative. Such dietary constraints inflicted upon Brahmin widows were intended to render them physically weak and alter their appearance, aligning with religious and social codes of morality (Lamb 1999, 546). The dietary restrictions were also aimed at controlling

widows' sexual appetites, as they were expected to lead lives akin to *brahmacharinis*, observing complete celibacy (Chakraborty 2002, 912). Widows were restricted to consuming raw rice, typically the *atap* variety (as opposed to the parboiled variety generally consumed in Bengal), once daily, alongside permissible items. The deprivation of rice, a staple food in Bengal, underscores the profound impact of this dietary regimen on their well-being. Additionally, a high-protein diet was strictly prohibited, excluding fish, meat, eggs, red lentils, certain legumes, seeds, and pungent elements like onion and garlic, all considered unsuitable for a widow's consumption. Fasting emerges as a recurring aspect of widows' lives, with *Ekadashi* (the eleventh day of the lunar calendar) fasting often viewed as a penance for sins from past lives rather than a means of pleasing the gods or ensuring the well-being of their families.

The film *Chokher Bali*, directed by Rituparno Ghosh explores widowhood and societal norms in late 19th-century Bengal, focusing on Binodini, a young, educated widow who challenges societal constraints. Tanika Sarkar's analysis highlights the significance of food and shelter as metaphors during this period of heightened nationalism in Bengal, with writers like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay invoking goddesses such as Jagaddhatri and Annapurna (Sarkar 1987, 2012). Set against this political backdrop, the film's male protagonists, Mahendra and Bihari, are portrayed as educated individuals involved in the nationalist movement. Despite discussions on widow remarriage within Bengali intelligentsia, little is done to improve the lives of widows like Mahendra's mother, Rajlakshmi, and aunt, Annapurna. The discourse surrounding the fate of Hindu widows in colonial India encompasses a complex interplay of religious, social, and colonial influences, which have left a lasting impact on gender dynamics within the Hindu household. Jasodhara Bagchi has highlighted the role of both Hindu religious texts and colonial authorities in shaping the treatment of widows, particularly in the context of the abolition of sati. Bagchi's examination reveals a tension between the authority of the *Shastras* (Hindu religious and socio-moral codes), which permit widows to live chaste lives but do not necessarily endorse practices like *sati*, and the efforts of reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy to persuade colonial authorities to prohibit sati, albeit at the expense of imposing restrictive traditions on widows (Bagchi 1993, 2214).

The concept of food neophobia introduced by P. Pliner and K. Hobden, characterized by the reluctance to consume certain foods or the avoidance of new culinary experiences, can be witnessed in the societal dynamics of late 19th century Bengal, particularly among widows (106). This reluctance can be attributed to introducing unfamiliar foods, such as chocolates

and tea, into Bengali domestic settings through interactions with Europeans and the absence of clear guidance regarding the permissibility of such foods for widows, adding to their uncertainty. A Christian nun visiting Binodini in the widow's home she is residing in soon after being widowed expresses surprise and concern about various aspects of Bengali Hindu widowhood. Offering chocolates to Binodini, she emphasizes their non-animal fat content. Initially hesitant, Binodini accepts the chocolates, revealing a familiar uncertainty akin to food neophobia. This uncertainty, however, differs from that of other widows like Rajlakshmi and Annapurna. Despite Binodini's education, proficiency in English, and familiarity with Hindu scriptures, her adherence to societal norms surrounding widowhood is influenced by deep-seated gastronomic trauma stemming from familial and societal conditioning. Binodini's introduction of drinking tea among the widows in Rajlakshmi's household is pivotal. By invoking Hindu *Shastras*, she relieves the widows of guilt and shame associated with tea consumption. She argues that the *Shastras* do not prohibit it, portraying how cultural norms and religious beliefs shape dietary choices and perceptions among widows. Furthermore, Binodini's discussion with Annapurna about confessing sins highlights the complexity of food-related guilt. Annapurna confuses confession with repentance, believing that consuming "European" drinks necessitates a "Christian" method of absolution. This association of sin with food underscores the transformation of sensory enjoyment into a source of psychological burden for widows, reflecting the intricate interplay between food, memory, and societal expectations.

The film *Goynar Baksho* (2013), directed by Aparna Sen, humorously portrays the ordeal of dietary deprivation through the character of Rasmoni, the family matriarch referred to as Pishimaa or paternal aunt in the film. Rasmoni, a wealthy but minimally educated widow, hailed from a prosperous land-owning family that migrated from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to West Bengal during the Partition of 1947. Despite the family's declining fortunes, Rasmoni clung to her gold jewelry beyond her demise. Within the narrative, Rasmoni's experiences echo the widespread deprivation experienced by upper-class widows concerning food. Despite being pampered by her brothers, Rasmoni's dietary options were limited. The film subtly illustrates this when she anticipates her meal, expecting the customary widow's fare of rice with boiled vegetables. Hindu gastronomic traditions imbue food with divine significance, elevating it beyond mere sustenance. Hinduism views food as *prana*, or life force, equating it with divinity (Moreno 1992, 147). R.S. Khare elucidates how food is revered as the deity of food, emphasizing its dual purpose of nourishing the body and soul (208). In Hindu South Asia, food preparation and con-

sumption have spiritual connotations, signifying a connection with the divine (203). The culinary oppression inflicted upon widows was not merely psychological but constituted a form of bodily warfare, rendering them weakened and silenced. The permissible diet for widows was a strategic societal measure aimed at diminishing a woman's physical vitality, prematurely halting her menstrual cycle, and effectively leading to her sexual demise. Even those with education and agency were rare, often constrained by societal norms enforced by widows. Rasmoni perpetuates this cycle by appointing her nephew's wife, Lata, as the caretaker of her jewelry box, warning her against wearing any pieces under the threat of widowhood—a fear as traumatizing as its realization. Rasmoni's ghost, while haunting the household, engages in nostalgic conversations about food, particularly reminiscing about a delicacy from her ancestral home—dried fish with garlic and chili paste. This evokes the lingering impact of gastronomic deprivation on her sensory psyche, highlighting the profound trauma ingrained in widows. Usha Menon notes how gastronomic experiences in Hinduism are intrinsically linked to spiritual fulfillment, with the concept of *rasa* transcending the physical act of eating (Menon 2017, 124). The denial of certain foods to marginalized communities serves as a means of exclusion from the Hindu framework (Narayanan 2000, 763). When offered meat by Lata, Rasmoni refuses, reaffirming her identity as a widow even in death. The paradox arises when considering why the ghost of a widow would be subject to the same gastronomic deprivation as the living. This conundrum underscores the deep-seated trauma associated with widowhood, wherein consumption itself becomes synonymous with sin.

In both films, the central characters share the common experience of being childless widows. Interestingly, their dietary restrictions are shown to be equivalent to those of Rajlakshmi, another widow who happens to be the mother of a successful son. This parity underscores a societal norm where even widows with successful offspring are subjected to the same dietary limitations as those without children if they are from upper-caste and/or class families. A pivotal moment in *Chokher Bali* occurs when Binodini invokes societal norms of guilt and shame regarding food consumption in confronting Rajlakshmi. Accused by Rajlakshmi of involvement with her married son, Binodini turns the accusation back by highlighting Rajlakshmi's indulgence in tea, suggesting a moral equivalence between the consumption of food and the satisfaction of sexual desires for widows. This comparison of desire and the associated stigma, whether related to food or sex, challenges the societal narrative that represses these basic human desires in widows. Both food and sex are portrayed as fun-

damental aspects of human existence, with neither being inherently less important than the other. The repression of these desires among widows, as depicted in the films, can lead to manifestations of shame and sinfulness, not only imposed by patriarchal society but also internalized by widows. The narrative suggests that the shame induced by consumption, whether of food or in the context of sexual desire, serves as a tool of oppression wielded by society against widows. Moreover, widows, in their efforts to conform to societal expectations, also perpetuate this cycle of shame and repression, condemning those who deviate from established norms. Ultimately, the pride arising from adhering to dietary restrictions becomes a means of punishment employed by widows against those who question or challenge the oppressive system that dictates their lives. This pride serves to reinforce the traumatic cycle of deprivation and shame, highlighting the complex interplay between societal expectations, individual agency, and internalized oppression within the widowhood experience. The narratives of widows in these two films reveal the complex relationship between food, desire, and shame within widowhood. Despite differences in education, wealth, and age, all widows depicted in the films grapple with societal expectations and the trauma of gastronomic repression.

The act of nourishing widows sustains their physical bodies and connects them to the divine essence inherent in all food. Furthermore, the denial of certain foods, such as fish, to widows serves to exclude them from auspicious domains, reinforcing their marginalized status within society. This restriction denies widows not only the pleasure of taste but also their rightful place within the community's spiritual and auspicious practices. In the film *Chokher Bali*, the portrayal of widows' attitudes toward food highlights the intersection of age and abstinence. The contrasting reactions of widows in the widows' home in Kashi to the smell of fish (made especially for the pregnant Ashalata, who was not a widow) highlight the varying degrees of abstinence and pride associated with age among widows. While older widows view impermissible food items with disdain (portrayed through an old widow's covering her nose with the loose end of her saree), younger ones may find solace and pleasure in them (shown through the teenage widow deeply inhaling and relishing even the smell of fish), suggesting varying degrees of adherence to dietary restrictions and societal norms. The exclusion of widows from domestic spaces, particularly the kitchen, further exacerbates their trauma and reinforces their marginalized status within society. The spatial segregation of kitchens perpetuates the notion of widows as outsiders, disconnected from sources of power and authority within the home. The segregation of the widows' kitchen further deepens this trauma, symbolizing the spatial and

psychological divisions within the domestic space, traditionally the domain of women. As a traditionally feminine space, the kitchen serves as a locus of power dynamics within the household, particularly among Brahmin families in South Asia. Appadurai's examination of Tamil Brahmin households elucidates the hierarchical structure of culinary authority, with women wielding significant influence over domestic affairs (Appadurai 1981, 497).

The kitchen becomes a site of exclusion for widows, who are unable to conform to familial norms and thus occupy a liminal position within the household. Food's significance as a memory and identity marker further complicates the relationship between widows and societal expectations. Mattias Strand's exploration of food and trauma emphasizes the role of gastronomic practices in shaping individual and collective memory, while Tanika Sarkar's analysis of literary evocations of Bengal's past underscores the cultural significance of food imagery in nationalist discourse (Strand 2023, 467; Sarkar 1987, 2012). However, despite the nostalgic invocation of abundance and nourishment, widows remain conspicuously absent from these narratives, highlighting their marginalization within familial and nationalistic frameworks. In conclusion, the treatment of Hindu widows in colonial India reflects a complex interplay of religious tradition, colonial authority, and societal expectations. While efforts to abolish practices like *sati* ostensibly aimed at promoting gender equality, they often resulted in the imposition of new forms of restriction and marginalization upon widows.

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CHAPTER 2

EXPLORING ADDICTION AND RECOVERY THROUGH THE HEALTH HUMANITIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF *BEAUTIFUL BOY* AND *TWEAK*

B L JAYADEV

Abstract

Drug addiction is a multilayered phenomenon, that makes its presence felt not only on the afflicted individual but also on their familial and social networks. The memoirs, *Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction* and *Tweak: Growing up on Methamphetamines* written by David Sheff and Nic Sheff respectively, serve as illuminating accounts that delve into the narratives of a father and son grappling with the complexities of substance dependency. David Sheff's book, *Beautiful Boy*, chronicles his son Nic's descent into the depths of addiction and the family's journey to help in his rehabilitation. This narrative parallels Nic Sheff's memoir, *Tweak*, an unflinching portrayal of addiction that prompts contemplation of the philosophical and ethical dimensions of the condition. It challenges us to explore the complex interplay among biology, environment, and free will in the development of addiction. In contrast, David Sheff's *Beautiful Boy* adopts a third-person perspective on addiction that encapsulates his yearning for an innately unattainable resolution: a comprehensive understanding and a definite cure for his son's methamphetamine addiction. Together, these memoirs provide rich material for exploring the human experiences of addiction and recovery through the lens of health humanities, which brings to the limelight complexities of addiction and the emotional toll it takes on families. Through this exploration, the study also underscores the imperative for healthcare professionals

to demonstrate sensitivity towards the emotional and social dimensions of addiction.

Keywords: Health Humanities, Addiction Memoir, Narrative Medicine, Lived Experience, Rehabilitation

Memoirs detailing the harrowing experience of illness have gained immense popularity in recent years. These accounts have enabled individuals to recognise that they are not alone in their struggles, thereby alleviating the isolation brought upon by the trials of ill health. Through the verbalisation and narrativisation of their experiences, the memoirists assert their individuality in the face of the objective authority of medicine to humanise what was once solely deemed pathological.

The current study will explore two memoirs that strive to complicate the intricacies of addiction – one from the perspective of the afflicted individual and the other from the perspective of a loved one/caregiver to provide a more holistic understanding of the condition. The paper will further argue that a fresh understanding of addiction can be gained from reading and critiquing the lived experience of addiction as portrayed in the memoirs. This will provide a foundation upon which can be laid an understanding that refuses to categorise addiction as solely caused by medical factors, thereby taking into account the numerous societal and emotional influences that contribute to its development and impact. Here is where health humanities and its subset narrative medicine[1] come into play, providing a necessary counterbalance to reclaim the societal in the clinical. This theoretical approach prioritises the afflicted individual's perspective and allows them to guide the narrative as the best advocate of their bodies. Healthcare professionals tend to prioritise medicine owing to its objective nature; hence, the patient's subjective stance is sidelined, drowned in the monolithic authority of medical science. Elaine Scarry echoes this sentiment in her critique *The Body in Pain*, where she examines the relationship between doctors and patients, contending that healthcare professionals consider the patient's voice as an "unreliable narrator" of bodily events.[2] This perception results in physicians marginalising the patient's subjective experience, which, in the context of an affliction like addiction, is of substantial value. The memoirs in question attempt to reinvigorate the subjective stance weakened by medical science for the patient and others

[1] Charon, Rita. *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10

[2] Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain - The making and unmaking of the World.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 6

affected to understand the illness not in terms of mere biological facts, but in terms of the socio-cultural factors as well. The selected works also investigate how addiction can affect not just the individual grappling with it but also people in their proximity.

Addiction and recovery literature has emerged as a distinct genre, partly due to its attraction to a voyeuristic public interested in narratives detailing personal downfall and subsequent redemption, experiences that are distant from their own lives. Additionally, the genre reflects societal attitudes where the addict archetype, marginalized by a capitalist society that prioritizes productivity and physical capability, is often stigmatized. The memoirs *Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction* and *Tweak: Growing up on Methamphetamines* written by David Sheff and Nic Sheff respectively, runs parallelly as the father and son duo provide candid portrayals of their familial experience with addiction. Nic Sheff recounts his firsthand experience with addiction during his adolescence and early adulthood in his memoir *Tweak*. He reconstructs a life blemished with lying, stealing, prostitution, legal troubles and medical emergencies, all of which happened in direct relation to his substance abuse. He describes his "addicted self" as having a reduced capacity to regulate urges, a sense of entitlement, and a consistent need to justify his substance (ab)use. In contrast, his "sober self" is portrayed as emotionally explicit, raw and honest, as a result of which readers are left anxious yet hopeful for his ultimate recovery. On the other hand, David Sheff pens his memoir from the perspective of a helpless father whose son is addicted to methamphetamine, detailing innumerable sleepless nights where he lay awake fearing for his child's mortality in the throes of addiction.

David[3] starts his memoir by painting a picture of his son returning home from college where he brings to focus Nic's relationship with his siblings. This is an interesting aspect as people generally expect books that deal with such an unpleasant and taboo topic like that of addiction to begin with extremely graphic elements that more or less contribute to the stigmatised view of the condition. It is to be appreciated here that David tries to show that his son is not wholly immoral as one would expect him to be, and that he belongs to a "normal" family and has healthy familial relationships. This is explicated in the opening paragraph, where Nic's siblings are shown to adore him. Through his memoir, David explores the pursuit of knowledge about the affliction that plagues his child. The reader can sense that he chases after a certainty of his son's wellbeing, only to be left flus-

[3] For the sake of distinction, the author has opted to refer to David Sheff and Nic Sheff as "David" and "Nic," respectively.

tered and answerless as to why his son would do anything that would be detrimental to his own health. He dives deep into Nic's upbringing and explores potential events in the father-son relationship that could have triggered it. He questions whether he could have done anything differently and whether it would have changed how things were with his son. David laments,

> What happened to my son? Where did I go wrong? According to Al-Anon, it is not my fault. But I feel solely responsible. I repeat the litany: if only I had set stricter limits; if only I had been more consistent; if only I had protected him more from my adult life; if only I had not used drugs, if only his mother and I had stayed together; if only she and I had lived in the same city after the divorce.[4]

Here, David questions his parenting, blaming himself for his son's predicament. David goes on to describe the struggle of trying to differentiate normal child development from signs of drug use. This is an interesting aspect as adolescents are particularly known to be susceptible to the allure of drugs, a vulnerability that coincides with the physiological and psychological changes of puberty. This period is marked by fluctuations in appetite and mood swings, symptoms that are also commonly associated with habitual drug use. Consequently, it can be challenging to distinguish between normal developmental changes and potential drug abuse in children. Despite failing to identify a precise cause, David finds it difficult to overcome his guilt and ends up forging ambiguous reasons to bear the guilt for his son's suffering. This is exasperated by the fact that David struggles to determine the extent to which Nic can be held responsible for his actions, for when it comes to a disease like addiction, the addicted individual is placed in a dichotomy, a spectrum between autonomous volition and complete compulsion. The concept of addiction as a disease rooted in the neurochemical functioning of the brain is difficult for David to grasp, making it hard for him to decide how to behave or respond to his son.[5] David is hence caught at a crossroads, as it is evident that Nic still has some sort of agency over his actions. However, then again, he frequently encounters the notion that it is the "disease" that is in control and that this disease is the reason his son does these questionable activities. Here, the ambivalence of navigating between considering addiction as a disease or a moral failing can be understood as stemming from the oversimplified cultural under-

[4] Sheff David, *Beautiful Boy: A Fathers Journey Through His Son's Addiction* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 177
[5] D Sheff, *Beautiful Boy,* 149