

Expounding Madness and Survival in S. L. Bhyrappa's "*Brink*"

Vartika Sharma¹, Dr. Anupriya Roy Srivastava²

¹Research Scholar, Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan

²Assistant Professor, Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan

Abstract

Brink is a Kannada novel translated into English by R. Raghunath and published in 2020 by Niyogi Books. The novel explores mental health, anxiety, depression, madness, and the interpersonal relationships of a saviour. It delves into the depths of the psyche and mental health. The main protagonist is Dr. Amrita, an intellectual woman. Her husband, Somasheskhar, is regarded as an empathetic partner. He plays a crucial, compassionate role in the novel. He serves as a widower and has lost all his ethics. He also tries to convey to Amrita that there is a connection between human connection and natural maturity. The novel is a deep study of the psyche of a character suffering from mental illness. She has bipolar disorder. These situations highlight the instability of loved ones. The novel is also described as a journey from ethics to echoes of Sage. S. L. Bhyrappa uses stream of consciousness to provide a clear picture of ethics. The novel's narrative style is unique, suggesting that romantic love is immature. The only hope is to keep the bridge stable and prevent it from collapsing. This paper will study the survival strategies of the main protagonist.

Keywords: Madness, Survival, Psyche, Caregiver, Stigma

1. Introduction

S.L. Bhyrappa is a contemporary writer who explores psychological complexes in his work. He employs various strategies to reveal real social problems to society. In this novel, Bhyrappa uses a single person's life to present crucial insights into the inner life. This novel also talks about sanity and death. The representation of suicidal attempts, depression, and anxiety is the core theme of the novel. *Brink* represents the shaded rather than stereotypes. This novel depicts madness through the character of Dr Amrita. Her character shows the engulfing pain and anger. She was in the phenomenon of Madness that forced her to be Mad. Somashekhar becomes an unknowing supporter of compassion.

Madness and survival are interdisciplinary concepts examined in the novel. This approach enables the exploration of different areas and their cultures. It rejects the biomedical model of treatment and provides insights into lived experiences. It also traces how the history of Madness has transitioned from a historical to a contemporary perspective. Madness is associated with a metaphor of lived reality that connects to literature. Mad, Madness, and mental illness directly represent the identity of survivors. This field intersects with disability studies, queer studies, and neurodiversity.

In a research paper by Deepika T and Bhuvaneswari R, entitled “Understanding the Suicidality of Working Women in Santeshivara Lingannaiah Bhyrappa’s Brink,” the authors discuss the conditions women face, namely depression and loneliness. They quote, “The narrative of her experience closely mirrors that of several Indian working women who exhibit suicidal tendencies. Analyzing Amrita’s inclination towards suicide can aid in understanding the occurrence of suicide among Indian women” (Deepika 26). In India, the condition of a working woman is miserable. The society pushes them towards suicide. When a woman finds a reliable connection to her life again, it helps her regain her identity.

According to Veena Das in her book *Life and Words* – Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary, she discusses the suffering inflicted by violence. In these powerful lines, Das portrays the common suffering of partition survivors. This also includes the 1984 massacre of Sikhs at the command of the prime minister, Indira Gandhi. This violence creates anger among ordinary people who were living their normal lives. Veena Das compares violence to literature. Das noted

In the register of literature, Cavell asks whether Shakespearean tragedies might not be a response to (what philosophy identifies as) skepticism: “Yet, might it not well haunt us, as philosophers, that in King Lear doubt as to a loving daughter’s expressions of love, or in Othello doubt cast as jealousy and terror of a wife’s satisfaction, or in Macbeth doubt manifested as a question about the stability of a wife’s humanity (in connection with witches), leads to a man’s repudiation or annihilation of the world that is linked with a loss of the power of or the conviction in speech?” As I have suggested elsewhere, this theme of annihilation of the world, or of finding oneself within the scene of world-annihilating doubt, is not necessarily tied to big events—I then located the unknowability of the world and hence of oneself in it in the ordinary—for instance, in interactions around witchcraft accusations among the Azande that interrupt the ordinary but are still part of the everyday, or in the pervasive sense that the real could not be authorized in the narratives of health and illness in my ongoing studies of low-income neighbourhoods in Delhi. I argued that in these cases, we get an intuition of the human as if one of the aspects by which a person could be seen were that of a victim of language, as if words could reveal more about us than we are aware of in ourselves. (7)

In the novel, the main protagonist, Amita, is deeply affected by her past. Her ongoing struggle throughout her journey is evident in multiple suicide attempts. Amita is an intellectual woman, a lecturer, and the mother of two children. She lives in a gloomy state of mind, marked by intense pain, agony, and anger. Bhyrappa calmly handled Amita’s situation. His writing is diverse; he employs stream-of-consciousness in the novel. His writing portrays the dark and disturbed life of Amita’s psyche. She delves into both a woman’s and a mother’s emotional states. Somashekhar, while repairing her house in Mysore, began to feel affection for her, a development that plays a crucial role in the story. Amita’s madness often tests Somashekhar’s devotion.

According to Roy Porter, his book, “Madness: A Brief History”, discusses the changes from historical to modern treatment of mental illness. Approaches and perceptions of madness and survivorship sometimes change. In his book, Porter asks who is called insane and how we can analyse treatment. Sometimes the treatment of a disease is a dangerous cure. This book is a balance between the findings to cure. Porter quoted

These drastic splits within psychiatry as to the nature of mental illness (reality, convention, or illusion show how wise old Polonius was. And, following his wisdom, the brief historical survey that follows makes no attempt to define true madness or fathom the nature of mental illness; it rests content with a brief, bold, and unbiased account of its history. Yet psychiatry's past, as well as its scientific status, has also been hotly contested. 'The story in its broad outlines is familiar, wrote Sir Aubrey Lewis, the eminent director of the Institute of Psychiatry, attached to the Maudsley Hospital in London, in a review of Foucault's book. (4)

In the novel *Brink*, Bhyrappa portrays Amrita in a deep dilemma. She is maintaining a professional life under pressure while also facing self-destruction. Society expects Amrita to abide by patriarchal rules, meaning she must follow all societal norms. Despite being an intellectual working woman, Amrita is surrounded by traumatic memories and loneliness. She wants to live her own life. Somashekhar's constant support brings her back and helps her believe that connections among family members are important for recovery.

Another prominent scholar, Michael Foucault, in his book "Madness and Civilisation," discusses madness and the cultures surrounding it. Foucault examines the 18th-century situation in Western society and how madness was perceived. He argues that "madness is a social construct and that it excludes individuality. Foucault also shows how society sees eccentricity as something to be captured". (45) They maintain institutions to confine them and ensure proper oversight of medical care. In the 17th century, institutions such as the General Hospital of France confined the poor, the unprivileged, the insane, and the criminals. Later, these hospitals were called 'Mad Houses'. Foucault also discusses the radical shifts in the perception of madness, from acceptance to unreason or danger. Madness is created as a 'ship of fools', where the mad are seen as floating between two cities. This clearly shows their status and their prioritizing themselves. He also talks about the discipline required to maintain it. A person who is diagnosed with a mental illness should be treated as a human, not as an animal. Modern psychiatry research shows that illness is curable. They prepared the framework to treat them. Foucault observes

Thus, while the person living with mental illness is entirely alienated in the real person of his doctor, the doctor dissipates the reality of the mental illness in the critical concept of madness. So that there remains, beyond the empty forms of positivist thought, only a single concrete reality: the doctor-patient couple in which all alienations are summarised, linked, and loosened. And it is to this degree that all nineteenth-century psychiatry really converges on Freud, the first man to accept in all its seriousness the reality of the physician-patient couple, the first to consent not to look away nor to investigate elsewhere, the first not to attempt to hide it in a psychiatric theory that more or less harmonized with the rest of medical knowledge; the first to follow its consequences with absolute, in an almost motionless movement, clings to and casts off itself. (277-278)

This research analyses the madness and survival between Dr Amrita and Somashekhar. Bhyrappa uses a realistic approach to depict the societal norms that women must follow. Bhyrappa follows a rigid structure in his writings. He avoids romanticising mental illness and portrays the raw, unvarnished reality of life being destroyed by it. This shows how an ordinary person's life has been destroyed. The entanglement of love between Dr Amrita and Somashekhar shows the pain Amrita inflicts on her love and how he endures it. This novel sets the fragile boundary between love, saga, and depression. Bhyrappa believes that genuine

love requires a moral commitment. Then love is formed. Dr Amrita becomes harsh towards Somashekhar. He continually tries to help her overcome the traumatic memories she has.

The character of Somashekhar embodies patience towards his wife. He claims that when a person falls in love, it requires only affection. The commitment to their long love becomes immortal. The journey of a survivor includes the psychological pain of memories, the inevitable pain of a survivor. This shows the reality of self-destructiveness. Brink is not an ordinary novel. This novel teaches us that ‘love is not always a happy ending’; sometimes it requires sacrifice. A person who has suffered so much pain becomes toxic towards the caregiver. In a contemporary scenario, some women are facing depression and anxiety and have a traumatic past, but they are unable to seek psychiatric treatment. When a person finds true strength in a partner, it helps her regain her happiness. When Somashekhar found out that Amrita was depressed with her life, he did not leave her. “Amrita, whom he loved, who, a little before, had with the gentle tenderness of royal jasmine, teemed sap de vitae into his body, mind, and soul, was eager to end her life by putting a bullet in her body; he came to know how much he loved her”. (Bhyrappa 50)

The fear of losing a loved one is evident in Somashekhar’s eyes and actions. Somashekhar gives Dr Amrita hope as she struggles to change her life. For good and progressive mental health, hope and caregivers are important. With the help of connections, Dr Amrita's transformation makes her unique and motivates her to begin a new life. When a person falls into the trap of depression, they may not speak to anyone, but with the help of a caregiver, they can begin to regain their identity. This work symbolises the human psyche. Bhyrappa shows how in contemporary society, mental illness is treated, whether you are educated or not. Though madness is purely a psychological concept, it doesn’t relate to the biological factors. As factors are important in life survival, a passive state of mind is not an active one. The right path shows Amrita a new life. She was on the edge of suicide. He always cherished her, but she refused it. “Get up and come here,” he scoffed at her. Don’t command me. I give a damn for orders,” (21) she retorted. Ultimately, Bhyrappa loses the hope of being together and caring. He also believes that how dark it is in our lives has humanity still survives it.

Work Cited

1. Bhyrappa, S. L. *Brink*. Edited by R. Ranganath Prasad, 15 Sept. 2020, www.google.co.in/books/edition/Brink/Q7MAEAAAQBAJ?hl=en.
2. Das, Veena. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent Into the Ordinary*. India, University of California Press, 2007.
3. Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. 1961, monoskop.org/images/1/14/Foucault_Michel_Madness_and_civilization_A_History_of_Insanity_in_the_Age_of_Reason.pdf.
4. Porter, Roy. *Madness: A Brief History*. 2002, syllabus.pirate.care/_preview/library/Roy%20Porter/Madness_%20A%20Brief%20History%20%28382%29/Madness_%20A%20Brief%20History%20-%20Roy%20Porter.pdf.
5. T, Deepika, and Bhuvaneshwari R. “View of Understanding the Suicidality of Working Women in Santeshivara Lingannaiah Bhyrappa’s *Brink* | Space and Culture, India.” *Spaceandculture*. in, 2026, www.spaceandculture.in/index.php/spaceandculture/article/view/1459/570.