

Report on 10-days Faculty Internship at IIT Hyderabad

Under the supervision of

Dr. Shubha Ranganathan, Assistant Professor, Department of Liberal Arts

By: Nitika Gulati, College of Technology and Engineering, Udaipur

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I interned under Dr. Shubha Ranganathan, Assistant Professor, Department of Liberal Arts from 17-27 June, 2019 to seek her valuable guidance on developing my Ph.D. proposal on Mental Illness in Works of Indian Literature in English. My experience here has proved to be immensely helpful with the following:

- **Guidance on Ph.D. proposal**

The primary reason behind my internship with Dr. Shubha Ranganathan was that her area of research interest coincided with mine i.e. Mental Health. This opportunity helped me to work under her guidance and build my Ph.D. proposal. Her support and guidance has been invaluable. With her insights, she has provided me with possible directions that I could lend to my research.

- **Networking**

My internship at IIT provided me opportunities to meet new people and talk to researchers interested in similar field as mine. Dr. Ranganathan put me in touch with Ph.D. scholars and professors who could help me in my project. Daigy, a Ph.D. scholar, helped me get acquainted with the campus (bus timings, cafeteria, etc.). I also got introduced to Dr. Shuhita Bhattacharjee, Assistant Professor, Department of Liberal Arts, whose feedback on my ideas has been immensely useful to me. I look forward to maintaining these contacts and collaborating on research endeavours in future. Dr. Ranganathan has also given me contacts outside of IITH who are from similar research area and could guide me in my work.

- **Access to library and reading material**

Dr. Ranganathan provided me enough reading material, both online and offline, to go through to help me shape and reshape my ideas. I could also access the library with the help of Sudarshan, another Ph.D. scholar under her, who very kindly took me

around and introduced me to the various works that could be of relevance to me. He also shared with me with a reading list of works that I could be interested in to develop my proposal further.

Abstract:

My project seeks to examine mental illness in works of Indian Literature in English. Literary narratives of mental illness not only shape but also reflect how society views mental illness, thereby working towards a better public understanding of the lived experience of a person with illness. Mental illness narratives, particularly first-person memoirs, refute culturally dominant notions about mental illness as a weakness, limitation or shameful condition that leads to isolation. (Re)claiming the voice to write one's own story is an emancipating act in itself. Fiction, too, helps in humanizing the experience, dispelling myths, promoting diversity of representation, making it less foreign and generating empathy. However, deficiency of Indian literary works in the area of mental health and the absence of critical engagement with these works is indicative of the collective pedantic attitude concerning mental health in India.

Over the last decade, the concern has begun to surface, and a few works have attempted to deal with the issue. In 2012, Jerry Pinto wrote *Em and the Big Hoom*, recounting his experiences about his mother grappling with Bipolar Disorder. It contributed towards sparking a conversation about mental health issues in India and when people came to him sharing related stories of their life, he compiled these short memoirs into *A Book of Light: When A Loved One Has A Different Mind* (2016). More attempts include Amandeep Sandhu's *Sepia Leaves* (2008) about the narrator's mother's battle with schizophrenia, while Reshma Valliappan's *fallen standing: my life as a schizophrenist [sic]* (2014) recounts the narrator's own experiences of the events leading to diagnosis and treatment of her schizophrenia. Gayathri Ramprasad's *Shadows in the Sun: Healing from Depression and Finding the Light Within* (2014) provides a cross-cultural (American and Indian) lens to depression through the narrator's thirty-year long battle with the illness, and Gayathri Prabhu's *If I Had to Tell it Again: A Memoir* (2017) is concerned with the narrator's father's and her own fight with clinical depression. Shreevatsa Nevatia's *How to Travel Light: My Memories of Madness and Melancholia* (2017) voices the narrator's struggle with his bipolar disorder.

Through a textual analysis of these texts, my study will seek to raise and answer questions pertinent to the field of Health Humanities, which brings together experiences from arts, humanities and healthcare to establish the contemporary understanding of mental illness.