

‘Continuity in Discontinuity’: Interpreting the Practice of ‘Narrative Care’ for Alzheimer’s in Select Indian Literary Texts



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Arthur Kleinman’s distinction between illness and disease in *The Illness Narratives* (1980) redefined the understanding of illness by shifting focus from biomedical definitions to the lived experiences of affected individuals. His emphasis on suffering, healing, and the human condition underscored the necessity of integrating palliative care into medical practice, laying the foundation for “narrative medicine.” This approach, encompassing literature, cinema, and art, seeks to interpret and respond empathetically to the narratives of individuals with illnesses and their caregivers. In the context of age-related cognitive impairments such as Alzheimer’s, fictional narratives serve as vital mediums for humanising these experiences. They raise awareness and cultivate empathy by offering intimate portrayals of the challenges faced by patients and their informal caregivers. This presentation examines two such works—*Girl in White Cotton* (2019) and *Vismrit: A Journey through Alzheimer’s* (2021)—as narratives of geriatric care that engage with disabling conditions, cultural stereotypes like *pagalpaan* and *dimag kharab*, and caregiving practices in India. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from narrative gerontology and critical dementia studies, the analysis explores how subjective embodiment and intergenerational exchanges affirm personhood, even amid memory loss and fragmented identity. These narratives emphasize the complex intersections of caregiving, cultural representation, and healthcare in the Indian context, offering a nuanced understanding of ageing and dementia through a humanistic lens.

Biography:

Priyanka Tripathi is an Associate Professor of English at the Indian Institute of Technology Patna (India). She serves as Co-Executive Editor and Associate Editor for *JWS* and *JGNC*. She has been awarded the prestigious Charles Wallace India Trust Visiting Fellowship (2024-25) at the University of Leeds. She was also awarded the IPD Visiting Research Fellowship (2022-23) at IASH, University of Edinburgh. Her monograph is titled, *The Gendered War: Evaluating Feminist Ethnographic Narratives of the 1971 War of Bangladesh*. She works in the areas of Gender Studies, South Asian Fiction, and Medical Humanities.