

Carolyn Brackets and Breakdowns: The Writerly Paradox of Mental Illness in Shaheen Bhatt's *I've Never Been (Un)Happier*

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Abstract

Shaheen Bhatt's *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* (2019) announces its formal project in a single typographical gesture. It is the parenthetical *un* suspended within its title, destabilising meaning in both directions simultaneously. This paper argues that this stylistic paradox is the governing formal principle of a memoir that uses language against itself to express what conventional discourse such as the clinical and confessional cannot adequately hold. It draws on Aijaz Ahmad's argument that literary forms are always inscribed within histories of ideology, Meenakshi Mukherjee's reflections on the negotiation between colonial inheritances and postcolonial assertion in Indian English writing, and Roland Barthes' theory of the writerly text. The paper reads Bhatt's formal choices such as the parenthetical title and the philosophical self-interrogation of the prose as a distinctly contemporary Indian literary intervention. Mental illness remains heavily stigmatised and the discourse of celebrity confession threatens to reduce suffering to spectacle in this cultural landscape. Bhatt's style performs a double resistance against the pathologising language of clinical depression and against the sentimentalising language of Bollywood privilege. The paper further draws on Suzette Henke's concept of scriptotherapy to argue that Bhatt's memoir constitutes her recovery through its formal enactment. The writing itself is the healing, and the style is its evidence. The paper contends that Bhatt's memoir represents a significant and undertheorised contribution to the emerging tradition of feminist life-writing in India by situating *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* within the contemporary moment of Indian literary studies.

Keywords: *Scriptotherapy, Writerly paradox, Depression memoir, Indian women's life-writing, Cultural stigma, Style as resistance*

I. Introduction

Shaheen Bhatt's *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* (2019) begins with a provocation quietly embedded in its own title. The parenthetical *un* suspended between brackets destabilises the title's meaning. Is she saying she has never been unhappier? Or that she has never been happier? The brackets hold both possibilities open simultaneously insisting that the experience of depression cannot be captured by a single and unparenthetical declaration. In four words and one typographical gesture, Bhatt announces the formal project of her memoir. It is to use language against itself and to find in paradox and instability the only honest mode of expression available to someone writing from within the experience of mental illness.

This paper argues that this stylistic gesture is the governing formal principle of a memoir that is about the inadequacy of available language to express what depression feels like from the

inside. Bhatt is a screenwriter by profession. She is someone acutely attuned to the relationship between form and meaning, between what is said and how it is said. The formal self-consciousness of *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* takes several distinctive shapes. There are the diary entries that precede the chapters which are raw by the retrospective understanding that the memoir's main prose achieves creating a counterpoint between the experiencing self and the narrating self that is one of the text's most formally interesting features.

To read *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* as a work of literary style rather than merely as a personal document or a cultural intervention in the discourse of mental health is to situate it within the critical conversations that this paper draws on. Aijaz Ahmad's foundational argument in *In Theory* (1992) that literary forms are "always already inscribed within histories of class, nation, and ideology" (Ahmad 43) provides the paper's first theoretical lever. Bhatt's stylistic choices are ideological, shaped by and responding to the specific cultural conditions of contemporary India in which mental illness is stigmatised and the Indian English literary memoir is a form with particular social and cultural stakes. In the preface Bhatt states, "It took me a long time to understand the nature of the illness I was living with since as a condition, depression is particularly stigmatized in Indian society and not to mention widely misunderstood in general." (Bhatt, Preface) This is Bhatt herself naming the ideological conditions such as the Indian cultural stigma that Ahmad's framework illuminates.

Meenakshi Mukherjee's reflections in *The Perishable Empire* (2000) on the negotiation between colonial inheritances and postcolonial assertion in Indian English writing provide the second. Bhatt writes in English. She writes in a confessional mode with deep roots in Western literary tradition. Roland Barthes' distinction between the readerly and the writerly text, between texts that position the reader as passive consumer and texts that demand active participation in the production of meaning provides the paper's central formal framework. Bhatt's memoir is a writerly text in Barthes' sense, one whose formal paradoxes and instabilities demand that the reader do interpretive work that the text itself refuses to do. The paper draws additionally on Suzette Henke's concept of scriptotherapy. It is the idea that writing trauma can itself be a form of healing. It is the act of narrating suffering as a constituent part of it. It is to argue that Bhatt's formal choices are not separable from the memoir's therapeutic project.

I've Never Been (Un)Happier was published by Penguin India in 2019. It has received considerable popular attention, particularly in the context of growing conversations about mental health awareness in India. Yet its critical reception has focused almost entirely on its value as a personal testimony and a contribution to mental health discourse. It has not yet subjected its formal and stylistic dimensions to sustained literary theoretical analysis. This paper attempts to fill that gap and in doing so to situate Bhatt's memoir within the emerging tradition of contemporary Indian feminist life-writing. The stylistic innovations deserve the same critical attention that has been lavished on the more celebrated names of Indian English literary culture.

The paper proceeds in four further sections. Section 2 examines the parenthetical title as the memoir's governing stylistic paradox, drawing on Barthes. Section 3 reads the diary entries through Ahmad and Mukherjee to situate the memoir's formal structure within the ideological conditions of contemporary Indian literary culture. Section 4 applies Henke's scriptotherapy to argue that Bhatt's style enacts rather than merely describes her recovery. Section 5 concludes by

situating *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* within the contemporary landscape of Indian literary studies.

II. The Parenthetical Self: Barthes and the Writerly Title

Roland Barthes differentiates between the readerly and the writerly text in *S/Z* (1974). He begins with a fundamental proposition about the purpose of literary work: "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (4). For Barthes, the readerly text that is *le lisible* positions the reader as a passive consumer of stable and pre-determined meaning, leaving them with "no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum" (4). The writerly text that is *le scriptible* by contrast, refuses this reduction. It is not a thing to be consumed but a practice to be entered, "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds...we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one" (5). The writerly text demands active and productive engagement. It multiplies meaning and its plurality "is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible" but an assertion of difference itself (5).

Bhatt's title is writerly in precisely this sense. *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* produces two contradictory meanings simultaneously which are absolute misery and absolute joy. It refuses to adjudicate between them. The brackets hold both open readings, creating exactly the plurality of entrances that Barthes describes. The parenthetical *un* is a galaxy of signifiers compressed into a single typographical gesture. It governs the entire memoir that follows as a permanent reminder that the experience being narrated resists the singular and readerly language that the dominant recovery narrative demands.

This formal paradox is an epistemological claim about the nature of depression itself. It is about what it feels like to live with a condition that presents itself as a complex and often invisible state that conventional language is structurally ill-equipped to express. Bhatt makes this claim explicitly in the memoir's prose. Depression is the uncanny neighbour of happiness. It is a condition that can coexist with privilege, success, and laughter in ways that make it invisible to others and bewildering to the sufferer herself. The parenthetical *un* enacts this coexistence formally. It places the unhappiness and the happiness in the same typographical space. It refuses to separate them into before and after, suffering and recovery, illness and health.

Barthes' writerly text is characterised by what he calls the plural of the text. He calls its capacity to generate multiple and irreducible meanings that cannot be subordinated to a single authorial intention or a single interpretive framework. *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* is plural in this sense in its formal architecture. The memoir is structured around a counterpoint between two distinct registers of writing which are the diary entries that precede each chapter and the retrospective prose of the memoir itself. These two registers create a productive tension and a writerly instability, that is one of the text's most formally interesting features. The diary entries are raw and present-tense. They record the experiencing self in the moment of crisis, before understanding and before the retrospective composure that memoir conventionally requires. The memoir's prose is reflective and retrospective. It is the narrating self-looking back on the experiencing self with the understanding that time and writing have made possible.

This formal instability is ideologically significant. It is here that Barthes' framework must be supplemented by the more politically grounded frameworks of Ahmad and Mukherjee. A readerly memoir of depression is the one that delivers a stable, unequivocal narrative of suffering, diagnosis and recovery would reproduce the very discursive structures that Bhatt's memoir is implicitly resisting. The clinical discourse of depression produces readerly narratives. This is what depression is, this is what it feels like and this is what recovery looks like. The celebrity confessional produces readerly narratives. This is my suffering and this is my journey from darkness to light. Bhatt's writerly title and writerly form resist both of these readerly conventions. They insist that depression is an experience whose meaning is always in brackets. It is always simultaneously unhappier and happier, always refusing the closure that both clinical and confessional discourse demand.

The parenthetical self of Bhatt's title is a formally radical gesture in the context of contemporary Indian literary culture. It is this radicalism that the following section examines through the frameworks of Ahmad and Mukherjee.

III. Form, Ideology, and the Contemporary Indian Literary Memoir

Aijaz Ahmad's foundational argument in *In Theory* that literary forms are "always already inscribed within histories of class, nation, and ideology" (43) is a proposition that bears directly on *I've Never Been (Un)Happier*. Ahmad further notes that the Indian university's relation to its British and American counterparts is one of fundamental dependence, such that "knowledges produced there become immediately effective here, in a relation of imperial dominance, shaping even the way we think of ourselves" (44). Bhatt's choice to write in English and to publish her depression memoir through Penguin India in a form recognisable to both Indian and global anglophone readers. This is an ideological decision shaped by precisely these conditions of literary production and circulation that Ahmad describes. The confessional memoir form she adopts has deep roots in Western literary tradition. Its deployment in the Indian context carries with it the full weight of the metropolitan literary culture within which Indian English writing circulates and is evaluated.

Meenakshi Mukherjee's reflections in *The Perishable Empire* illuminate the specific ideological stakes of Bhatt's formal choices with considerable precision. Mukherjee argues that in the history of Indian writing, "the language in which they wrote seemed to automatically determine the way this reading would be processed for creative purposes" (18). Furthermore, Mukherjee identifies a historical assignment of Indian women as custodians of interior and mother-tongue expression, "the separation of the interior as sacral space uncontaminated by the West and woman as its preserver" (22). Bhatt's memoir violates this assignment doubly. She writes her interior life in English, and she makes that interior life public. They are in Mukherjee's terms, an "ideological reconstruction moulded by an implicit political agenda in which language has a determining role" (8). The parenthetical *un* is written in English and that too is a political act.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's argument in *Provincializing Europe* that European thought is "both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations" (16) It illuminates the specific formal condition of Bhatt's memoir with considerable precision. Bhatt's writerly style is the renewal of an inherited form "from and for the margins" (16) It is a formal negotiation of the partly opaque relationship

between the European categories she must use and the Indian life-world she is actually writing from. The parenthetical *un* of her title is the most concentrated expression of this negotiation. It uses the inherited language of happiness and unhappiness while refusing to let that language settle into the stable and singular meaning that the European confessional tradition demands.

Bhatt's memoir inhabits this double bind in a particularly acute form. On one hand, it is recognisably and specifically Indian. It is embedded in the culture of Bollywood, the social dynamics of a Mumbai celebrity family and the specific ways in which privilege and suffering coexist in a society of extreme inequality. She says,

There is a cultural reverence for fame and celebrity that has insidiously convinced us all that we're not enough the way we are, and when the person in the bedroom next to yours is someone who's wildly famous there is bound to be an extended amount of confusion. (Bhatt 51)

This is Ahmad's inscription of ideology within literary form made flesh. This shows how Bhatt's depression is inseparable from the specific ideological conditions of Bollywood celebrity culture. On the other hand, it aspires to and achieves a universality of emotional and philosophical register that reaches beyond the specifically Indian context. Bhatt is writing about the experience of depression as a human condition. Her philosophical reflections draw on a wide range of Western intellectual traditions including Stoic philosophy and contemporary psychological research. The memoir negotiates this tension between the local and the universal, the specifically Indian and the broadly human. It negotiates through its style, and particularly through its essayistic and philosophical prose register that refuses both the narrowly confessional and the narrowly sociological.

Mental illness in India is shaped by cultural narratives about weakness and the incompatibility of suffering with privilege. Bhatt addresses this stigma directly and repeatedly in the memoir's prose. But she also addresses it formally through the very act of writing and publishing a memoir about depression in English. It is from within a position of Bollywood celebrity that she is performing a cultural intervention that the style of the writing must carry. Bhatt's writerly style is its philosophical composure and its counterpoint between diary rawness and memoir reflection. She navigates between these two risks, claiming the authority to speak about depression without either exposing herself to the stigma's most damaging effects or surrendering the personal and embodied truth of her experience to the abstractions of clinical discourse.

Ahmad's argument about the inscription of literary form within ideology is also relevant to the memoir's most distinctive formal feature. It is the diary entries that precede the chapters. The diary is a form with a complex ideological history in Indian women's writing. Bhatt performs a formal gesture that is also an ideological one by incorporating diary entries into a published memoir. She brings the private into the public and insists on the legitimacy of the unguarded emotional record alongside the composed philosophical reflection. This shows the experience of mental illness is not separable from the public cultural conditions that produce and sustain its stigma.

The tradition of Indian women's life-writing within which Bhatt's memoir situates itself is one long marked by the erasure and concealment that Mukherjee identifies as characteristic of Indian English women's writing. Kamala Das's *My Story* (1976) is the foundational text of this tradition. It opens with a scene of authorial erasure that resonates across decades. Das's poem, read aloud to a distinguished visitor, is attributed to Shirley, the white girl with golden ringlets. While "the brown children were always discreetly hidden away, swept under the carpet" (Das 3). The woman writer is present but not named. Her work circulates but her authorship is invisible. This condition of invisibility runs through the tradition, from the figure of Ammalu who is Das's great-great-aunt who wrote poems in secret and whose notebooks were discovered only thirty years after her death to Bhatt's own acknowledgement that writing about depression in India means writing against a culture that prefers its suffering hidden. "Her writings disturbed me," Das says of Ammalu. "I felt that after thirty years she was trying once again to communicate with the world and with me" (Das 17). Bhatt's memoir refuses this thirty-year silence. It communicates now, in the present tense of a woman who will not wait to be discovered posthumously.

Kirkpatrick's narrative framework for understanding mental illness experiences identifies what she calls counterstories. These are narratives that "offer resistance to dominant or master narratives either implicitly or explicitly, attempting to replace an oppressive identity with one that commands respect" (63). Bhatt's memoir is a counterstory in precisely this sense. The dominant cultural narrative of depression in India that it is a weakness, a luxury and unworthy of public acknowledgement is the master narrative against which her writerly style is constructed. Kirkpatrick notes that "illness and oppression both silence a person's voice; it is for this reason that telling one's story can be so empowering" (65), and crucially, that "at any cultural moment, society is ready to hear some stories but not others. However, rights for any group members begin with the narratability of their stories" (65). By publishing her memoir in India in 2019, Bhatt is claiming its narratability at a cultural moment when the Indian public discourse on mental health was only beginning to open. The style of the memoir such as the parenthetical title and the philosophical register is the form that this claim takes. It is a writerly counterstory against a readerly master narrative of silence.

It is this ongoing quality and the insistence on the coexistence of unhappiness and happiness that connects the memoir's formal ideology to the scriptotherapeutic argument of the following section. For if the style of *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* is an ideological intervention in the cultural conditions of contemporary India, it is also and simultaneously a therapeutic one.

IV. Scriptotherapy and the Style of Healing

Suzette Henke's concept of scriptotherapy was developed in *Shattered Subjects: Trauma, Testimony, and Women's Life-Writing* (1998). She defines it as a narrative frame through which traumatic experience is "aesthetically controlled" (26). It is a formal practice of writing that organises the flood of repressed and painful memory into something survivable. Henke cites H.D.'s own description of her writing as words of a spell "that in a sense... keep me alive" (27). It is a formulation that maps onto Bhatt's memoir with striking precision. Bhatt's diary entries, spanning from age thirteen to twenty-eight and including the age twenty-eight entry "I won't do it though. Never. But I want it," are precisely this kind of spell. The writing keeps the writer alive through the moment of crisis. Henke further argues that scriptotherapy is deliberate. It is

a writer “deliberately writing autofiction in the context of scriptotherapy” (39). They choose formal strategies that enact therapeutic recuperation. Bhatt’s professional background as a screenwriter makes this deliberateness credible. Her parenthetical title and her philosophical prose register are carefully constructed formal choices whose therapeutic function is inseparable from their aesthetic one.

This distinction between healing as achievement and healing as process is one of the memoir’s most significant formal and philosophical contributions. The recovery narrative is the dominant form through which mental illness is narrated in both clinical and popular culture. It is structured around achievement. It is a before state of illness and an after state of recovery. This structure is readerly in Barthes’ sense. It delivers a stable and reassuring meaning. It closes down the complexity of the experience into a manageable arc. It positions the reader as the passive recipient of a lesson about suffering and its overcoming. Bhatt’s memoir refuses this structure. Its healing is a practice. It is something that must be done again and again, in the writing of each diary entry and in the ongoing act of finding language for what continues to resist easy expression.

The diary entries are the most visible formal evidence of this scriptotherapeutic practice. Each diary entry is a record of the experiencing self in the moment of crisis. It is raw, unmediated and emotionally unguarded. These entries are presented as evidence of how bad things once were before the recovery was achieved. They are presented as part of the memoir’s present tense. They are presented as the writerly counterpoint to the philosophical prose. They remind the reader at every turn that the experiencing self and the narrating self coexist within the same text just as the unhappiness and the happiness coexist within the same parenthetical title. The diary entries are scriptotherapy in its most immediate and unmediated form. Writing happens in the moment of trauma as a way of surviving the moment rather than narrating it retrospectively.

The relationship between the diary entries and the memoir’s main prose is therefore scriptotherapeutic in a double sense. The diary entries represent the first stage of scriptotherapy. It is the immediate and survival-oriented act of writing through the crisis. The memoir’s reflective prose represents the second stage. It is the retrospective and understanding-oriented act of narrating the crisis from the vantage point of partial recovery. But crucially, Bhatt does not present these two stages as sequential. It is presented as if the diary entries belong to the past and the memoir’s prose to the present. She presents them as simultaneous as the formal enactment of her central argument that depression and its overcoming are coexistences. The scriptotherapy of *I’ve Never Been (Un)Happier* is a continuing process and the memoir’s form is the evidence of its continuity.

The *Chime* framework expanded as Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning and Empowerment was developed by Leamy et al. through a systematic review of 97 studies of personal recovery. It defines recovery as “a deeply personal, unique process of changing one’s attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and/or roles... a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life even with the limitations caused by illness” (445). This definition maps precisely onto Bhatt’s memoir as a narrative of living meaningfully alongside depression, of demanding lessons from pain. The *Chime* framework identifies “rebuilding and redefining a positive sense of identity” and “overcoming stigma” as among the most frequently documented recovery processes, present in 57 and 40 of the 87 studies reviewed respectively (448). Bhatt’s

scriptotherapy is her act of writing and publishing a memoir about depression in the specific cultural context of Bollywood India. It is precisely this kind of identity rebuilding and stigma overcoming. It is performed through literary form. Furthermore, Leamy et al.'s subgroup analysis of studies focusing on individuals from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds found a "greater emphasis on spirituality and stigma" and identified "culturally specific facilitating factors and collectivist notions of recovery" as additional dimensions not present in majority-culture recovery studies (445). This finding is directly relevant to Bhatt's memoir where her recovery is shaped by the specific stigma of mental illness in Indian society and the cultural reverence for celebrity that she explicitly names as complicating her relationship with her own suffering. The clinical literature thus confirms what the literary theoretical analysis has argued. Bhatt's recovery is culturally specific and formally enacted through the very act of writing that her memoir performs.

Henke's framework also illuminates the memoir's philosophical register. It is the essayistic and reflective prose that distinguishes it from more straightforwardly confessional life-writing. For Henke, scriptotherapy works through the construction of meaning. It works through the interpretive acts by which the writer organises suffering into a framework that makes it comprehensible and survivable. Bhatt's philosophical reflections and her engagements with Stoic philosophy and contemporary psychological research are scriptotherapeutic in this sense. They are functional acts of meaning-making and the specific ways in which Bhatt constructs the interpretive framework through which her experience of depression becomes writable. The philosophy is the therapy. The style is the healing.

This is perhaps most visible in Bhatt's treatment of the relationship between depression and identity. It is one of the memoir's most recurring and most carefully developed philosophical preoccupations. Depression is not something that happens to a self that exists independently of it. It is a condition that shapes and reshapes the self from within. It inflects perception, memory and self-understanding in ways that make it impossible to say with confidence where the depression ends and the self begins. This is a philosophically sophisticated claim. It is one that the memoir's style enacts as well as states. The parenthetical *un* of the title is a formal paradox about the self, about the impossibility of a stable and unparenthetical identity when one lives with depression. The self of Bhatt's memoir is always parenthetical. It is always simultaneously the self that depression has made and the self that exists alongside and despite it, always both unhappier and happier. It always refuses the closure of a single and unbracketed identity.

The clinical research on mental health recovery narratives provides important empirical grounding for this literary theoretical argument. Llewellyn-Beardsley et al. define mental health recovery narratives as "first-person lived experience accounts of recovery from mental health problems. This includes elements of both adversity/struggle and of self-defined strengths, successes or survival" (2019, 5). By this definition, Bhatt's memoir is a recovery narrative. But it deploys those elements in formally unconventional ways that the clinical literature itself identifies as both legitimate and underrepresented. The same authors warn that approaches to recovery narratives risk inadvertently constraining "the kinds of story that individuals feel they can tell within these contexts," and may "needlessly and wrongly distress those who do not fit their model" (2019, 4). Bhatt's writerly style such as its parenthetical title and its refusal of the upward trajectory is precisely the kind of narrative that resists this constraining template. The

2020 refinement of this framework further identifies what it calls “compulsory positivity” as a characteristic failure mode of dominant recovery narratives. It is a generic requirement for emotional uplift that, as the research shows, can “perversely make things worse” for recipients who do not recognise their own experience in the upward trajectory the dominant form demands (Llewellyn-Beardsley et al. 2020, 304). Crucially, the clinical literature itself confirms that “a core domain of recovery is its non-linearity” (Llewellyn-Beardsley et al. 2019, 20). This is a finding that validates Bhatt’s formal insistence that healing is process, ongoing, and always parenthetical.

Henke’s scriptotherapy reveals the memoir’s deepest formal and philosophical claim. It is the act of writing. It is the act of finding style for the parenthetical self, of constructing the writerly paradoxes and formal instabilities that this paper has been analysing. She writes her recovery into existence. The style of the writing is the formal enactment of everything that recovery means. It is the ongoing and formally self-conscious practice of living with the brackets,

Depression has taken a lot from me and it has also given me a lot, but only because I eventually demanded it. I demanded my lessons and I took them head on. ‘You must not allow your pain to be wasted, Shaheen,’ my father once said to me. I chant that quietly to myself – ‘My pain must not be wasted,’ I say – and I try to learn, I try to do. I grieve and cry and hurt but I also take my medication and go to therapy. I watch my soul being bent and twisted into painful, unnatural shapes and then I marvel at how I’ve never seen it from those angles before. (Bhatt 60)

This is scriptotherapy at its most explicit. The writing is the demanding, the insisting and the refusing to waste the pain. The final image that is watching the soul from angles never seen before shows how writing produces new self-knowledge. It is this practice its formal dimensions and its significance for the contemporary landscape of Indian literary studies that the conclusion draws together and situates within the broader critical conversation that this paper has been contributing to.

V. Conclusion

Shaheen Bhatt begins *I’ve Never Been (Un)Happier* with a typographical gesture. The parenthetical *un* is suspended between brackets, and refuses the closure of a single stable declaration. This paper has argued that this proposition governs the memoir at every level from the counterpoint between diary entries and reflective prose to the philosophical register of the writing itself. Reading it through the theoretical frameworks of Barthes, Ahmad, Mukherjee, and Henke reveals a text of considerably greater formal sophistication and ideological complexity than its reception as a mental health memoir has yet acknowledged. Bhatt’s father’s dialogue through the very end is the philosophical core of the memoir,

You’re exhausted because you’re always pretending to be something you’re not. You’re constantly trying to reach this non-existent, ideal state of emotional well-being. It’s not real. You’re being set up to fail... Take off the mask. You aren’t happy? Fine, you aren’t happy. One day you will be. And then you’ll be sad again. Accept that and stop wasting your energy chasing something that doesn’t exist. You can’t spend your life feeling bad about feeling bad. (Bhatt 55)

This is the fullest articulation of the post-melancholic position the paper argues Bhatt occupies. The father's words are the memoir's counter-text to the dominant recovery narrative's compulsory positivity. The paper's argument has proceeded in three movements corresponding to the three theoretical frameworks it has applied to the memoir.

The first movement established the memoir's writerly character through Barthes. It establishes its resistance to the stable and unequivocal meanings that the readerly recovery narrative typically delivers. The parenthetical title is writerly in Barthes' precise sense. The diary entries and the memoir's reflective prose create a writerly counterpoint. It creates a formal instability that enacts the memoir's central argument that depression and its overcoming are coexistences. The writerly form is an epistemological claim. The experience of mental illness cannot be rendered in readerly language without falsifying it.

The second movement situates this writerly form within the ideological conditions of contemporary Indian literary culture through Ahmad and Mukherjee. Ahmad insists that literary forms are always inscribed within histories of ideology. It illuminates the specific resistances that Bhatt's stylistic choices perform. Mukherjee's framework illuminated the memoir's negotiation of the double bind of Indian English writing. Its simultaneous embeddedness in the specific cultural conditions of contemporary India and its aspiration to the universality of philosophical reflection transcends those conditions. The diary entries and their formal gesture of bringing the private into the public were read as an ideological act. It is the insistence that the personal experience of depression is not separable from the cultural conditions that produce and sustain its stigma.

The third movement argued that Bhatt's style is a therapeutic intervention through Henke. The writing enacts the recovery it narrates. The distinction between healing as achievement and healing as process emerged as the memoir's most significant formal and philosophical contribution to the genre of the depression memoir. Bhatt's scriptotherapy is a continuing process, formally enacted in the coexistence of diary rawness and memoir composure. It exposes experiential immediacy and retrospective reflection, unhappiness and happiness within the same parenthetical title. The philosophical prose was read as functional meaning-making. Scriptotherapy is most intellectually ambitious and through the construction of an interpretive framework, depression becomes writable. The style is the healing and the parenthetical self of the title is the formal signature of a recovery that refuses to pretend it is finished.

These three movements together form a memoir that is a contribution to contemporary Indian literary culture. The paper seeks to examine how Indian literary production is being reshaped by contemporary aesthetic and theoretical developments. *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* is precisely such a voice and precisely such a style. It is genuinely new in the context of Indian English women's life-writing. It does so from within a position of Bollywood celebrity and the specific stigma of mental illness in contemporary India. This gives its formal interventions particular ideological weight and cultural significance.

It also invokes Dipesh Chakrabarty's argument that "the present is not a homogeneous time but one that is shot through with multiple pasts and futures." Bhatt's memoir is a text shot through with multiple temporalities such as the past of the diary entries, the present of the

reflective prose, the future of the recovery that is always still in process. To read it as a contribution to contemporary Indian literary studies is to recognise that the contemporary moment in Indian writing is a moment of new formal possibilities. These new ways hold the brackets open and insists that the most honest thing a writer can do is to place the *un* between brackets and let it stay there.

Bhatt's parenthetical *un* is the most contemporary of formal gestures. It is a gesture that belongs to a moment in Indian literary culture when the discourse of mental health is finally, beginning to find public language. It holds its contradictions open and refuses the closure of either pure happiness or pure unhappiness and insists on the coexistence of both. *I've Never Been (Un)Happier* is the formal enactment of that insistence. It is a work of stylistic originality and ideological seriousness that the critical conversation on contemporary Indian literary studies urgently needs to acknowledge.

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