

Exploring the Interplay between Fiction and Cinema: Depicting Mental Health Issues

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ABSTRACT

Fiction and film are two of the most important literary mediums; each has a special ability to enthrall readers and tell stories. This paper explores the complex connections between fiction and film, showing how they are related to one another within the field of literature. The paper navigates the symbiotic relationship between these media, tracing their evolution and mutual influence over time. It begins by exploring their enduring relevance. The way that mental health and related concerns are portrayed in fiction and film is fundamental to the field of this study. It reveals the rich portrayal of mental health challenges faced by people across a variety of backgrounds and life stages through a carefully chosen selection of films that span genres and groups. These films provide moving insights into the complex nature of mental health issues and the coping strategies used by those impacted, spanning all age groups and genders. Hence, the objective of the paper is to talk about the relationship between fiction and cinema in literature and how these mediums are used to depict mental health issues.

Keywords: Fiction, Cinema, Literature, Mental Health, Representation, Coping Mechanisms, Interplay

A novel and a film are two totally different mediums, each having its own artistic compulsions, though the purpose is the same – to tell a story. Since the time film has shifted its focus from animation to story – telling, the relationship between fiction and cinema has been close and quite significant. A novel and a film differ not only in format, but also in their distinct artistic imperatives. While both mediums aim to communicate stories, they do so in different ways due to their fundamental characteristics. A novel, with its focus on language and internal narrative structures, goes deeply into the complexities of character development, convoluted plots, and vivid descriptive landscapes. It has the freedom to examine characters' inner thoughts and emotions in great detail, resulting in a universe that unfolds in the reader's mind.

The objective of this study is to understand the relationship between literature and cinema and the role it plays in demonstrating the mental health issues faced by people irrespective of their age or their gender. The paper lists a few films that have depicted the struggles faced by people in dealing with mental health issues and how the society plays a role in either

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helping them cope and get out of their problem or how the society can be major cause for the person's condition.

LITERATURE

Literature is a property that allows space for interpretation, not just for classics but also for human action. Literature, at its core, is a realm of limitless interpretation, providing fertile ground for investigating not only timeless classics but also the complexities of human action and experience. At its essence, literature acts as a mirror for the human condition, reflecting the various complexity of reality via the lens of storytelling. Whether it is the classic works of literary giants or contemporary narratives, literature encourages readers to engage in an interpretive process, gleaning meaning from the written word and relating it to their own life. One of the distinguishing characteristics of literature is its inherent ambiguity and susceptibility to multiple interpretations. A single work of literature can elicit a wide range of responses, with readers interpreting its themes, characters, and symbolism through the prism of their own experiences, beliefs, and cultural origins. This diversity of viewpoints enriches the reading experience, allowing literature to speak to readers on a very personal level while also encouraging discourse and debate in larger literary communities.

Furthermore, literature transcends time and geography, providing insights into the human condition that remain as relevant today as they were centuries ago. Through literature, readers can delve into the complexity of love, loss, identity, and morality, obtaining a better understanding of themselves and the world around them. Whether it is Shakespearean tragedies or modern thrillers, literature serves as a repository of human wisdom and insight, shedding light on the universal truths that unite us as a species.

In this view, literature is not a static product, but rather a dynamic force that alters our perception of the world and ourselves. It encourages readers to engage in a process of introspection and empathy, allowing them to put themselves in the shoes of the characters and experience the world from different viewpoints. By accepting the ambiguity and depth of literature, readers can embark on a path of self-discovery and enlightenment, discovering meaning and resonance in the stories that speak to their souls.

Finally, literature's ability to interpret extends beyond the page, permeating all aspects of human action and interaction. Whether it is the decisions made in daily lives or the larger tales that form society, literature provides a framework for comprehending the intricacies of human existence and the various ways individuals traverse the world around them. In this way, literature is more than a property; it is a profound and lasting witness to storytelling's ability to illuminate the human experience.

CINEMA

Film, particularly since its transition from a purely visual medium to one centered on story, has developed a symbiotic relationship with fiction. Through the lens of cinema, stories are visually realised, with the ability to elicit emotions through a mix of sights, sound, and acting. The combination of these aspects enables filmmakers to fully immerse moviegoers in the story, providing a sensory experience that lingers long after the credits roll. During this transformation, the relationship between fiction and cinema has become more intimate and consequential, with directors using the depth and breadth of fictional storytelling to explore a wide range of themes, emotions, and societal challenges.

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Furthermore, technological advancements have blurred the distinctions between these mediums, allowing book adaptations to transcend the constraints of the written word and appear as cinematic spectacles that fascinate worldwide audiences. Despite this convergence, each medium has its distinct identity, providing distinct opportunities for storytelling and artistic expression. While a novel excels at exploring the complexity of inner worlds and abstract notions, a film may use pictures to communicate strong feelings and magnificent scenery. Thus, while the objective of both mediums remains narrative, the way they achieve this purpose reflects the complicated interplay of their various artistic compulsions. This dynamic relationship between fiction and cinema continues to change, providing fertile ground for creativity and innovation as storytellers across mediums push new narrative boundaries.

When a novel is adapted into a film, the creative relationships change, revealing a collaborative yet individually individualized process. The novelist, as the creator of the fictitious universe, imbues it with people, settings, and tales that reflect their creative vision. These characters live in a universe expertly built by the writer, each with their own motivations, eccentricities, and complexities that add life to the narrative tapestry. When a filmmaker enters the adaptation process, they become the curator of this literary universe, responsible with transferring the essence of the novel to the cinematic canvas. While the raw elements for the characters and storyline are drawn from the novel, the director's responsibility goes beyond simple duplication. Instead, they include their own artistic sensibilities, imbuing the adaptation with their distinct perspective and creative flare. Indeed, the adaptation serves as the director's canvas, allowing them to put their particular touch on the story by injecting it with their own interpretations and thematic focus. The plot emerges through the director's perspective, shaped by their perceptions, ideas, and creative impulses. Every decision, from casting to visual aesthetics, embodies the director's vision, transforming the adaptation into a mirror of their artistic identity.

In essence, while the novel serves as the foundation, the director's skill ultimately defines the film's incarnation of the plot. They bring recognizable characters and themes to life through complex storytelling tactics and directorial decisions, providing spectators with a unique perspective on the literary work. Thus, the adaptation process becomes a symbiotic collaboration between the novelist's conception and the director's interpretation, resulting in a cinematic trip that is both loyal to its literary beginnings and uniquely transformative in execution.

LITERATURE AND CINEMA

The symbiotic link between cinema and literature transcends geographical boundaries, as evidenced by the extensive adaptations in both Hollywood and Indian cinema. In Hollywood, this relationship is obvious, with many bestselling novels finding cinematic counterparts and frequently receiving critical acclaim and prizes at prominent events such as the Academy Awards. The union of literature and cinema in Hollywood is about more than just commercial success; it is about elevating storytelling to the level of art, with adaptations routinely praised for their quality and complexity. Similarly, literature has had a deep and long-lasting influence on Indian cinema. Across languages and locations, directors have embraced bestselling literature, providing rich ground for cinematic inquiry. What is noteworthy is India's rich linguistic and cultural landscape, where novels in multiple languages are turned into films that appeal to viewers across the country. This openness emphasises the universality of storytelling, which bridges linguistic and cultural barriers through the medium of film.

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During its early phases, Indian cinema relied significantly on literary texts for inspiration and narrative content. These adaptations not only supplied filmmakers with interesting tales, but also opened up new avenues for exploring societal issues, cultural intricacies, and human emotions. Whether it is the ageless classics of Indian literature or modern bestsellers, novels have had a significant impact on the cinematic environment, infusing it with various plots and thematic depth. Furthermore, adaptations of literary works in Indian cinema are not limited to a single language or location. Many works have been recreated in many languages, demonstrating how adaptable and universal the ideas are. This cross-pollination of literature and cinema not only promotes artistic interchange, but it also builds a greater appreciation for narrative in its various forms.

The link between cinema and literature exemplifies the enduring power of narrative. Across continents and cultures, novels continue to inspire and improve cinematic experiences, generating a creative synergy that transcends boundaries and enhances both mediums. As cinema progresses and literature continues to enchant audiences, this ageless bond remains a foundation for artistic expression and cultural interaction. Stephen Bush in as early as 1911 observed that "...it is the business of the moving picture to make them known to all" (Lupack, 4). In fact, it is widely acknowledged that films become a medium for the larger sections of the society.

This paper is an interdisciplinary study of literature, films and psychology. The paper details some of the films that have depicted mental health issues. Some of the films that are male-centric, women-centric, children-centric and senior citizen-centric having mental health issues as its premise have been detailed below.

Male-centric movies depicting mental health issues:

- **Kapoor and Sons (Bollywood, 2016)**

Kapoor and Sons, also known as *Kapoor and Sons (since 1921)* is a Bollywood film that talks about the complex familial relationships in an Indian family. Though it might seem that the film merely talks about an urgent family gathering and the love triangle that takes place when the major characters come together in the film, when looked at critically, the film touches upon the mental health of the characters. The film talks deals with mental health issues which are shown through signs like self – doubt, lack of direction, low self - esteem, emotional turmoil due to suppressed homosexuality, strained relationships with parents, struggle with self – acceptance and emotional suppression in parents. The film has received quite an amount of appreciation for its structured storytelling that delves deep into the lives of the characters, and through them into the lives of the audience.

- **Joker (Hollywood, 2019)**

This film had gained a great deal of appreciation for its portrayal of mental health issues and how it could take a toll on the person's character. The film deals with mental health issues like depression, anxiety, delusions, loneliness arising because of isolation, trauma arising through childhood abuse and most importantly, violence as a coping mechanism. The life of the protagonist as depicted in the film is a perfect example of the consequences of unmet mental health needs and the lack of support systems in a person's life. Apart from the mental health issues that are highlighted throughout the film, it also talks about the societal factors like poverty, inequality and social injustice.

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- **A Beautiful Mind (Hollywood, 2001)**

This film is an adaptation of the novel *A Beautiful Mind* by Sylvia Nasser. It is a biographical film of the economist and mathematician John Nash who was suffering from the psychological disorder called schizophrenia. The film revolves around the life of John Nash, how he dealt with the disorder and his life was affected by the disorder and the consequent mental health issues. The 'beautiful mind' that is referred to in the title of the film and the novel are that of John Nash's wife, Alicia who supported him throughout his life full of conflicts and sufferings. The mental health problems that the protagonist experiences as a result of the psychological disorder are hallucinations, social withdrawal, disorganised thinking and suspicion. The disorder also affects his personal relationship, most importantly his relationship with his wife.

- **Nitham Oru Vaanam (Kollywood, 2022)**

The film is about a man who loses his love right before he was about to get married to the girl and is unable to move on from the pain and agony caused by the loss. He isolates himself from the external world considering it as an escape from the questions and concerns of the people around him. However, this lasted only until he was told about the stories of similar people who found love and yet faced tragedy. His curiosity forced him to take a trip and visit all of these people in order to find out what happened in their lives. By meeting them realizes that tragic events are inevitable however, it is how one learns to deal and cope with it that makes the difference. The aspect of mental health issues in this film is seen when the protagonist shuts himself due to the separation from his lover. He loses all his belief in love and relationships until he meets the people who he read about.

- **Rain Man (Hollywood, 1988)**

This film about the relationship between two brothers who did not even know about each other's existence until their father left all of his property in the name of the older son. The younger brother, who did not feel any affection towards this new found older brother decided to manipulate him in order to get all the money. The older brother, an autism patient, is the character who experiences the mental health issues that are depicted through this film.

Suffering from autism, the character experiences many other consequences of the disorder which affect his already weak mental health. He has difficulty in maintaining his relationships, especially with his brother, he is socially isolated and also experiences communication issues which further worsens his condition and situation.

Women-centric movies depicting mental health issues

- **Dear Zindagi (Bollywood, 2016)**

Dear Zindagi is a Bollywood film directed by Gauri Shinde, who previously worked on the famous film *English Vinglish*. *Dear Zindagi* was released in 2016 and stars an ensemble cast led by Alia Bhatt and Shah Rukh Khan. The film follows Kaira (Alia Bhatt), a gifted cinematographer who struggles with numerous elements of her life, including her work, relationships, and emotional health. As Kaira navigates the trials of adulthood and self-discovery, she seeks advice from a therapist named Dr. Jehangir Khan, also known as 'Jug' (played by Shah Rukh Khan). *Dear Zindagi* was well praised for its sensitive depiction of mental health difficulties, Alia Bhatt's nuanced acting, and Shah Rukh Khan's magnetic presence as the helpful therapist. It resonated with audiences due to its relevant themes, heartfelt storytelling, and optimistic message of resilience and self-discovery. Jhaveri in her

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critical review states that, “Gauri Shinde's latest film is an emotionally resonant look at an issue that rarely gets covered in Indian society - therapy.” (*Rotten Tomatoes*)

- **Eat, Pray, Love (Hollywood, 2010)**

Eat Pray Love is a 2010 Hollywood film directed by Ryan Murphy and based on Elizabeth Gilbert's best-selling novel of the same title. Julia Roberts plays Elizabeth Gilbert in the film, and Javier Bardem, James Franco, Richard Jenkins, and Viola Davis appear in supporting roles. The story follows Elizabeth Gilbert, a successful writer who, despite her apparent success, feels lost and unfulfilled in her life. Following a difficult divorce and a failed rebound relationship, she sets off on a voyage of self-discovery and personal improvement, visiting Italy, India, and Indonesia in quest of balance, enlightenment, and love.

- **The Hours (Hollywood, 2002)**

The Hours is a critically acclaimed 2002 Hollywood film directed by Stephen Daldry and based on Michael Cunningham's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same name. The film has an ensemble of award-winning actors, including Meryl Streep, Nicole Kidman, and Julianne Moore. Set in several historical periods, *The Hours* weaves together the lives of three women who are linked by Virginia Woolf's work 'Mrs. Dalloway.' The story unfolds simultaneously, delving into themes of identity, mental illness, and the search for purpose and fulfilment in life. The film shows how the women from different parts of the world and who belong to different timelines relate with what the writer had written during her times and how the portrayal of the severe conditions of mental health are relevant across timelines.

- **Black Swan (Hollywood, 2010)**

The film *Black Swan* is another film that depicts the mental health and the psychological issues experienced by a woman. The film has been great discussed as it falls under the theme of female hysteria. In the past, women with a variety of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and hallucinations, which were occasionally connected to a presumed wandering uterus, were frequently diagnosed with female hysteria. Indirectly touching on the idea of female hysteria, the film, *Black Swan*, examines the expectations and pressures imposed on women in the competitive world of ballet, and how these pressures can result in psychological anguish and breakdowns, even though it does not specifically address hysteria. A psychological thriller that explores the demanding and cutthroat world of ballet professionals, *Black Swan* follows Nina Sayers, a gifted but dedicated ballerina, as she trains to be the best Swan queen in 'Swan Le Ke'. With focus on themes of pressure, perfectionism, and the costs associated with striving for perfection, Nina struggles with severe psychological issues of anxiety, self – doubt, and a brittle sense of self. Her experience serves as a warning about the unbridled perils of perfectionism. Through her experience of self – harm and disordered thinking, Nina's character incorporates some parts of the historical description of hysteria.

- **The Woman in the Window (Hollywood, 2021)**

The film delves into the portrayal of mental health conditions through the characterisation of the protagonist who struggles with agoraphobia, anxiety trauma and the blurred lines between perception and reality. The protagonist, Dr. Anna Fox suffers from agoraphobia, a condition in which the person fears and situations which might cause panic, anxiety,

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helplessness or embarrassment. She is even afraid of stepping out of her home. Adding on to the already severe conditions, the characters also experiences panic attacks which are depicted through physical symptoms life shortness of breath, trembling and sweating. The film received mixed reviews from critics, but Amy Adams' performance was widely praised for its intensity and emotional depth. Directed by Joe Wright, *The Woman in the Window*, delivers a gripping and atmospheric portrayal of suspense and paranoia, keeping the audience on the edge of their seats until the very end.

Children-centric movies depicting mental health issues:

- **Taare Zameen Par (Bollywood, 2007)**

A moving film released in 2007, portrays the story of Ishaan, a young kid who suffers from dyslexia, but his illness is initially misdiagnosed as scholastic failure and laziness. The film dives extensively into Ishaan's mental health issues, highlighting the enormous stress and loneliness he experiences as a result of his undiagnosed learning disability. It follows his transformation from a state of frustration and low self-esteem, aggravated by stigmatization from his teachers and peers, to one of empowerment and self-acceptance thanks to the guidance of an empathic and unusual art teacher. The teacher's assessment of Ishaan's specific learning needs and creative potential emphasizes the necessity of understanding and managing mental health in educational environments. The film highlights the impact of early recognition and support can have on the mental well – being and life trajectory of children with learning disabilities.

- **Child in the Night (Hollywood, 1990)**

Mike Robe's film deals with the sensitive topic of childhood trauma and its enormous impact on mental health. The film focuses on Dr. Hollis, a child psychologist played by JoBeth Williams, who becomes intimately interested with the case of a young girl named Lainie Wheeler, played by Elijah Wood. Lainie's horrific experiences, including witnessing her mother's death, resulted in extreme mental pain and psychological upheaval. As Dr. Hollis dives into Lainie's damaged psyche, the film gently addresses loss, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). *Child in the Night* draws attention on the intricacies childhood trauma and the critical role of compassionate mental health support in overcoming such traumatic events.

- **Inside Out (Hollywood, 2015)**

Directed by Pete Docter and Ronnie del Carmen, it is a moving and inventive investigation of mental health challenges, with a particular emphasis on emotions and the complexities of the human mind. The video depicts the inner workings of the mind of an 11-year-old girl named Riley, whose emotions are personified as Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust. The video effectively shows multiple mental health issues through Riley's experiences of moving to a new city and dealing with various life challenges. *Inside Out*, delves expertly into mental health concerns through a creative and emotional investigation of emotions, identity, and the inner workings of the human mind. By expressing these subjects in a sympathetic and accessible manner, the film provides significant insights into the intricacies of mental health, as well as the need of emotional awareness and self-care.

- **Ordinary People (Hollywood, 1980)**

The film digs into the complexities of mental health, concentrating on subjects such as loss, guilt, and family dynamics. The film follows the Jarrett family as they deal with the aftermath of their eldest son Buck's death in a boating accident. Here are some of the major

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mental health topics addressed in the film. It is a moving and nuanced picture of mental health difficulties, delving into the depths of grief, guilt, and perseverance in the setting of family interactions. The film's fascinating characters and poignant tale connect with audiences and highlight the necessity of compassion, communication, and support when overcoming the obstacles of mental illness.

- **What Maisie Knew (Hollywood, 2012)**

This film, directed by Scott McGehee and David Siegel, is a modern adaptation of Henry James' novel of the same name, which examines the effects of divorce on a little girl named Maisie. The film explores a variety of mental health subjects, with a particular emphasis on Maisie's inner struggle as she navigates the complexities of her parents' troubled relationship. This film is a moving and thought-provoking examination of the effects of divorce and parental conflict on a child's mental health. The film's empathetic representation of Maisie's experiences emphasizes the significance of prioritising children's emotional needs and creating a supportive environment for their growth and development. Bradshaw in his review notes that, "This is a rather sentimental, precious tale of a little girl caught up in her parents' bitter split." (*The Guardian*)

Senior Citizens- centric movies depicting mental health issues:

- **Quartet (Hollywood, 2012)**

It's a delightful comedy-drama set in a retirement home for musicians. While the film largely explores themes of aging, friendship, and the joy of music, it also addresses mental health challenges, particularly those related to aging and memory loss. The film is a joyful and uplifting look at aging and the human experience, with nuanced depictions of mental health difficulties interwoven with themes of friendship, resilience, and the enduring power of music.

- **Unfinished Song (Hollywood, 2012)**

The film, directed by Paul Andrew Williams, is a heartbreaking drama about bereavement, love, and music's transformational power. The film is set in London and chronicles the journey of Arthur (Terence Stamp), a grouchy and hesitant widower who finds peace and purpose by joining a local seniors' choir. Arthur's anguish and reluctance to interact with people add to his feelings of isolation and loneliness. He initially fights joining the choir and withdraws from social interactions, but eventually finds connection and support via his participation in the group. The film emphasizes the value of social relationships and community in overcoming loneliness and promoting emotional well-being.

- **The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (Hollywood, 2011)**

The film's ensemble cast of elderly folks embarking on a voyage to India discusses various elements of mental health in subtle ways. As they face the problems of aging and adjusting to a new environment, the film delves into issues of resilience, loneliness, and personal development. Each character deals with their own emotional issues, whether it's dealing with the death of a spouse, battling feelings of inadequacy, or seeking a revitalized sense of purpose. Through their interactions and experiences at the hotel, the film portrays the transforming potential of connection, community, and self-discovery in promoting mental well-being in later life. Finally, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, provides a compassionate representation of the challenges of aging and the human spirit's perseverance in seeking joy and fulfilment amidst life's uncertainties.

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- **Going in Style (Hollywood, 2017)**

The film is a comedy heist film that explores themes of financial distress, friendship, and the hardships of aging. While the film's plot is mostly funny, it also gently explores mental health issues, specifically the characters' sense of purpose and dignity in later life. Morgan Freeman, Michael Caine, and Alan Arkin play retirees who are struggling financially and feeling socially invisible. Their choice to rob a bank stems from desperation and a desire to reclaim agency and autonomy in a society that frequently ignores and undervalues the elderly. *Going in Style* thus sheds light on the psychological toll of financial stress and the struggle for dignity and self-esteem in the face of societal marginalization, offering a light-hearted yet poignant exploration of mental health issues in the context of aging.

- **Venus (Hollywood, 2006)**

The film is a sad drama about aging, mortality, and human connection. The film centers on Maurice (played by Peter O'Toole), an old actor, and Jessie (played by Jodie Whittaker), his young and lively caregiver. While *Venus*, concentrates on Maurice and Jessie's unorthodox relationship, it also addresses mental health issues, particularly in light of Maurice's increasing age and decreasing health. As Maurice faces the physical and emotional obstacles of old age, including the loss of his vitality and sense of purpose, the film sympathetically captures his feelings of loneliness, regret, and existential agony. Through Maurice's relationships with Jessie and his attempts to find purpose and connection in his final years, *Venus* provides a moving reflection on the challenges of aging and the human experience, including the psychological aspects of facing mortality and the search for contentment and friendship in later life. "Gauri Shinde's latest film is an emotionally resonant look at an issue that rarely gets covered in Indian society - therapy."

CONCLUSION

The most important linking factor between all these films is the aspect of mental health issues faced by its characters. However, the films reinforce that the characters do not stay in that phase of loss and grief for long. Instead, they decide to relieve themselves from the pain by finding out the cause of their struggle and grief and finding the solution to it. For example, Kaira decided to seek therapy in order to understand her situation and find out the solutions to her problems. Liz gets a divorce from her husband and decided to travel. Virginia Woolf looks at death as an escape and finds solace in it while Laura Brown decided not to die but instead leaves her unhappy marriage and family and decides live for herself. At the same time, Clarissa Vaughan makes peace with her situation and moves on in her life.

While each of the aforementioned films has a distinct narrative and setting, they all explore mental health issues. Across genres and time periods, these films explore the depths of human emotions, relationships, and personal hardships, providing realistic portraits of persons dealing with a variety of mental health issues. Whether it's the portrayal of anxiety and trauma in *The Woman in the Window*, the study of sorrow and resilience in *Ordinary People*, or the themes of loneliness and connection in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, these films emphasise the universality of mental health experiences. They emphasise the necessity of empathy, compassion, and assistance in negotiating the complexities of the human psyche. Finally, via their captivating storyline and compassionate portrayals, these films serve as powerful reminders of the need of approaching mental health concerns with compassion and dignity, creating greater knowledge and empathy for individuals who face such difficulties in their life.

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