

# DEPRESSION AND PAIN COMMONORBIDITY: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE LIVES OF FAMED MUSICIANS

<sup>1</sup>DIVYA ANNE JOSE, <sup>2</sup>UTHARA PRADEEP, <sup>3</sup>Dr. MEERA B.

**ABSTRACT**--Depression is the most co-morbid psychiatric disorder in people who die by suicide. It is as 'living in an endless black hole' or having an emotion of impending doom. The feeling of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness is unrelenting and intense. To identify and intensify the threat of this growing disorder, the paper aims on a systematic analysis of depression, which is prevalent among English singers who committed and attempted suicide, and those who suffered from depression and self-abuse. From the way we move to the way we laugh, depression changes everything about life. It even changes the way you speak and the expression of your writing. Sometimes the language of depression is much powerful than the effect of others. The paper concentrates on the depressive behavioural traits of famed singers and the innumerable complexities in their lyrics and their suicides. Many of these musicians killed themselves after suffering from depression for years. To create awareness about the hazard of this threat in our present scenario, we concentrate on the recently demised rock band singers Chester Bennington and Kurt Cobain. To strengthen the literary aspects and research theories, the paper is built upon the information collected from diary entries, journals, interviews, and biographies of the demised singers and their beloved ones. The greatest achievements of these individuals, their lyrics, are analyzed in depth to interpret the emotions and state of mind.

**KEYWORDS**--Depression, suicide, musicians, lyrics, Freud and Psychoanalysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Suicide is considered as the most sensitive and debatable topic with other serious issues associated with it like trauma and stress. It has often steeped into controversies that had riddled throughout history. Among other various mental disorders that tend to be closely associated with suicide, depression is a life-threatening risk factor. Over the years, we have lost many musicians to suicide, notably Kurt Cobain, Chester Bennington, and Jim Morris. What did those men have in common? – “Depression”. Our paper seeks to introduce suicide and depression as facts and the fictional aspects of suicide by analyzing the lives of singers like Kurt Cobain, Chester Bennington, and Jim Morris.

---

<sup>1</sup> INTEGRATED MA ENGLISH 2015, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LANGUAGES, AMRITA SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, AMRITA VISWA VIDYAPEETHAM, KOCHI CAMPUS

<sup>2</sup> INTEGRATED MA ENGLISH 2015, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LANGUAGES, AMRITA SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, AMRITA VISWA VIDYAPEETHAM, KOCHI CAMPUS

<sup>3</sup> ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LANGUAGES, AMRITA SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, AMRITA VISWA VIDYAPEETHAM, KOCHI CAMPUS

The word depression was coined from the Latin phrase “Depimere”. The dictionary definition of depression refers to it as the "feelings of severe despondency and dejection". But the meaning of the Latin term gives us more insight into this particular medical trauma. “Depimere” means nothing but "pressing Down", precisely, pressing down oneself to their darkest fears, allowing it to torment our minds, which gradually makes us sinners, haters and finally killers of our own life. Depression is not a new facet of humanity. It has joined our journey from the beginning. With depression comes its malignant twin “suicide”.

## **II. OBJECTIVE**

Suicide and depression are not dark friends of a particular sect alone but is the suppressing dictator of most of our population. The mere lives are never interesting to our human majority, but the unfortunate lives of famed and talented individuals are. The paper focuses on the short-lived lives of famous English singers who were enslaved by depression and the relationship between their depression and songs through the language of depression they used.

## **III. HYPOTHESIS**

Most of us think that the celebrities live a perfect and peaceful life, but some of us don't realize that they are humans and they feel how we all do. Have someone ever thought why there are a lot of sad songs that are composed by the musicians who are experiencing hardships and traumas in their personal lives? Even today people who suffer from these traumas are often reluctant to share what is going on openly, because of fear that our society will consider them as weak individuals. This paper offers a brief research on depression and trauma caused by the musicians, and how this reflected through their lyrics. The focus is mainly on Kurt Cobain the American musician, singer, and guitarist, and Chester Bennington, who is an American singer, songwriter, and an actor. These great artists who battled with trauma and depression opened their hearts through their songs taking people to the real world of mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and other illnesses. Thus the paper focuses on the short-lived lives of famous English singers who were enslaved by depression and loneliness throughout their life.

## **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Broadly speaking, Sigmund Freud's criticism of the Psychoanalytic theory is concerned with the quest for the discovery of connections between artists themselves and what they create (songs, poems, or even paintings of the sort). As far as singers and their music are concerned, the theory analyses the themes invented by these musicians, the language they use and this, is what in literary criticism we call Freudian imagery. The imagery helps us to understand an artist's work by analyzing their lives and creative productions. Here my paper uses the theory in reverse, i.e., to understand what these singers went through before allegedly committing suicide, we assess their songs and their given knowledge of lives. The theory is to be used in reverse as most of these singers despite being remarkably honest and open in many aspects, they always seemed to be cagey about their personal life. Observing that most of them had immense fame and popularity, they often turned sick of their hectic careers. Jimi Hendrix, Kurt Cobain, and Amy Winehouse were all prisoners of their image. Being called the "voice of the generation",

these failed souls of talent had a lot on their shoulders and were also exposed to a lot of criticism. Everybody had their haters, these musicians had plenty, some were strong enough to withstand judgments but singers like Hendrix and Brian Jones were victims to these. But with Janis Joplin, the scenario was different. She suffered from loneliness and her man was glaringly absent at the end. Naive and gullible these singers came through a lot of struggles and childhood traumas, ranging from child abuse to parental splits or poverty. Throughout their lives they wanted to be heard, not about their fancy cars or lush homes, but what they were. Some of them couldn't even sleep or be left alone as they heard these 'strange voices' in their head. Delusional, not them, but these singers were close. Depersonalization, traumatic stress, self-abuse, schizophrenia, insomnia, drug addiction, and alcoholic they had them all. Money bought them gifts that were complimentary to their deaths. They gave them drugs, alcohol steroids and all possible abusive addictions that helped them escape weaknesses. Weaknesses varied with singers, some had plain old addictions while others had troubled pasts or may be present.

Beck's theory, a cognitive approach by Aaron Beck is a theory that can be applied here. The theory is based on the depression and sufferings caused by factors like parental rejection, negligence, and abuse. Chester Bennington's childhood trauma began with the negligence and divorce of his parents which created a wound in his mind. Later the sexual abuse faced by him made him get into a depressed state of mind. According to this theory, negligence and hopelessness make them see their future as hopeless and worthless. People with these issues tend to make logical errors in their thinking creating severe issues. This leads them to situations like Arbitrary interferences, Selective Abstraction, Dichotomous Thinking, and Personalization. Arbitrary Inference and Selective Abstraction makes the depressed people focus on the worst aspect of their life whereas personalization makes them conclude that the negative events in their life are the results of their faults. Dichotomous Thinking makes the depressed people blur the distinction between black and white.

## V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mostly, rock stars rarely lead fantasy lives. Tragically, many notable singers have committed suicides. Most of the musicians who killed themselves did so after suffering from depression and anxiety for many years. When we think of musicians who committed suicide, Kurt Cobain is the first to come in mind. He, the front man of Nirvana killed himself with a shotgun in Seattle on April 5, 1994. Cobain was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder at his very young age, then later with manic depression which in medical terms is known as Bipolar disorder. It had a similar characteristic to that of clinical depression and mood swings, which were mostly presented as fury, high energy, recklessness, and similar other symptoms. As being a child Cobain used to seek solace in his bedroom closet. Later being a youth he started abusing himself for overusing alcohol and drugs as well. People frequently used to complain about laziness of Cobain, but these complaints varied with periods where he was highly productive, both in the studio and in the stage. He had a practice of writing highly emotional and angry letters to and about people he felt had deceived him. 'I hate myself and want to die' was Cobain's life philosophy, which he constantly repeated through his speeches, interviews and even through his songs. The lyrics of his song "Lithium" can be taken as an example.

[Verse 2]

"I'm so lonely, that's okay, I shaved my head

And I'm not sad

And just maybe I'm to blame for all I've heard

But I'm not sure

I'm so excited, I can't wait to meet you there

And I don't care

I'm so horny, that's okay, my will is good"

Cobain's lyrics often exhibited innumerable emotional complexities – a much complicated state than simple depression or Nihilism. Through his music, he communicated his moods and the emotional intensity of depression. This often enhanced the depth of his songs. The bipolar disorder and the anxiety he has undergone is visible in his lyrics in the form of pressured writing. His lyrics and artwork are that of a manic. An explicit picture of Kurt Cobain and his emotional disorders is visible through his lyrics. Some critics believe that Kurt was manic depressive because he wrote his famous song Lithium (A drug in treating this disorder). Cobain once said in an interview that the particular song Lithium talks about a man who after the death of his beloved turns to religion as a last resort to keep himself away from death."Cobain clinched that the lyrics of his most popular song "Lithium" was fictional but later he accepted that he added his personal notes into the song. However, Lithium was one of Cobain's early creation, composed years before Nirvana were major stars or Kurt's most serious problems developed. There is no obvious evidence that Kurt ever consumed lithium or he had already received a bipolar diagnosis.

Moving on to Linkin Park front man, Chester Bennington (20<sup>th</sup> March 1976- 20<sup>th</sup> July 2017) suicide can be called as a tragic event, one which was particularly painful for the fans who considered him as a role model. He never made a secret battle with depression and addiction. Bennington like his music was real and raw about his life and addictions. His craft often had a tone of hopelessness in it. Through his lyrics, Bennington mentioned the feelings he had been struggling with. In songs about grief, fear, mortality, and isolation his voice soared. His last song 'Heavy' appears to hint his troubled state of mind, which in a way can be called a suicidal note. The song contained haunting lyrics including 'I don't like my mind right now ....wish that I could slow things down'. "Heavy" clearly mirrored his depression. Take these lyrics for instance:

"I don't like my mind right now

Stacking up problems that are so unnecessary

Wish that I could slow things down

I wanna let go but there's comfort in the panic

And I drive myself crazy

Thinking everything's about me

Yeah, I drive myself crazy

'Cause I can't escape the gravity

I'm holding on

Why is everything so heavy?

Holding on

So much more than I can carry

I keep dragging around what's bringing me down

If I just let go, I'd be set free..."

The band has said that the inspiration for the lyrics of 'Heavy' came from their conversations about dilemmas and fears in their own life. Thus through these lyrics were confessional, through which Bennington proved the well-known saying 'when words fail, music speaks'. His success lies with his openness about personal battles with depression, anxiety, addiction, and betrayal. These deep feelings of agony and hopelessness began early in his life. Bennington was raised initially by a single father who was a police officer and who investigated on sexual crimes. "He was hardened by dealing with the s— of the world every day. So he brought a lot of that home." It was a very emotional situation," Chester told this through his famous song "Rolling Stone" in 2002.

Amidst these chaos's, Bennington had been sexually abused at his age of 7 by an older male friend. This developed a scar in his mind leading him to trauma. This event stayed with him for the rest of his life which took him to the world of drugs as well as alcohol. "I was a lot more confident when I was high. I felt like I had more control over my environment when I was on hallucinogens or drinking," Chester confessed this in an interview.

Soon, the "Numb" singer started using other dangerous drugs that included cocaine and methamphetamines. He got married at Olit in 1996 to his first wife Samantha and got sober, but this didn't last long. He fell back into old habits during Linkin Park's first tour which slowly led to his divorce in 2005. It was Chester's band mates who made him understand the consequences of his drug abuse and they helped him get back to his feet. He later explained this in an interview. He said, "In 2006, I had a choice between stopping drinking or dying. I did some counselling with the guys and they opened up and told me how they felt. I had no idea that I had been such a nightmare. I knew that I had a drinking problem, a drug problem and that parts of my personal life were crazy but I didn't realize how much that was affecting the people around me until I got a good dose of 'Here's-what-you're-really-like.' It was a shock. They said that I was two people – Chester and then that f—— guy. I didn't want to be that guy."

## VI. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

Through the songs of these famed musicians, their mental states, dilemmas, and trauma were analysed, which made us reach a conclusion that their lyrics were not just fictions, but was their emotions and suicidal notes. For them, Death was just an escape from the chaos of life, a transformation to a much higher state. Their songs were often sources of creation and empowerment, offering them a new voice to speak their minds and emotions to be heard. Thus, their lyrics in the form of poetry were used by these singers as a means of rebellion, denouncement, self-explanation, and therapy. Despite their tragic deaths, Kurt Cobain and Chester Bennington were 'reborn' through their poetry making themselves eternal.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The question of why arises here. Why do these people deliberately sacrifice their lives? It remains unanswered. To conclude, Kurt Cobain and Chester Bennington are much more than depressed singers with suicidal tendencies but they were the singers who shook the arenas through their raw emotions and distinct sound. Life is temporary, but art is eternal; these singers who battled with depression cannot be forgotten and the art they made will continue to inspire, support and entertain people till the end of humanity.

## REFERENCE

1. EDUZAURUS. 2020. The Relationship Between Suicidal Ideas And Depression - Free Essay Example | Eduzaurus. [online] Available at: <<https://eduzaurus.com/free-essay-samples/the-relationship-between-suicidal-ideas-and-depression/>> [Accessed 30 January 2020].
2. Firstpost. 2020. What Chester Bennington's Death Tells Us About The Trope Of 'The Troubled Artist Too Pure For This World'- Entertainment News, Firstpost. [online] Available at: <<https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/what-chester-benningtons-death-tells-us-about-the-trope-of-the-troubled-artist-too-pure-for-this-world-3839533.html>> [Accessed 30 January 2020].
3. DA, J., AL, B., PW, C., S, E. and S, K., 2020. The Kurt Cobain Suicide Crisis: Perspectives From Research, Public Health, And The News Media. [online] PubMed. Available at: <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8897665/>> [Accessed 30 January 2020].
4. Taylor & Francis. 2020. Disinformation, Performed: Self-Presentation Of A Russian IRA Account On Twitter.[online]Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1621921>> [Accessed 3 March 2020].
5. 2020. [online] Available at: <<https://genius.com/Nirvana-lithium-lyrics>> [Accessed 31 March 2020].
6. Genius. 2020. Linkin Park (Ft. Kiiara) – Heavy. [online] Available at: <<https://genius.com/Linkin-park-heavy-lyrics>> [Accessed 15 February 2020].
7. Genius. 2020. Nirvana – Lithium. [online] Available at: <<https://genius.com/Nirvana-lithium-lyrics>> [Accessed 12 February 2020].
8. Lives, T., 2020. Kurt Cobain And Manic Depression. [online] Bipolar Lives. Available at: <<https://www.bipolar-lives.com/kurt-cobain-and-manic-depression.html>> [Accessed 3 March 2020].
9. Reddit.com. 2020. Anyone Else Feel Like They're More Themselves When They're High? : Trees. [online]Available at:<[https://www.reddit.com/r/trees/comments/3e718n/anyone\\_else\\_feel\\_like\\_theyre\\_more\\_themselves\\_when/](https://www.reddit.com/r/trees/comments/3e718n/anyone_else_feel_like_theyre_more_themselves_when/)> [Accessed 16 March 2020].
10. Thefamouspeople.com. 2020. Famous Personalities Who Took The World By Storm After Committing Suicide. [online] Available at: <<https://www.thefamouspeople.com/suicide.php>> [Accessed 3 January 2020].
11. NewsComAu. 2020. Chilling Hints In Linkin Park Lyrics: 'I Don'T Like My Mind Right Now'. [online] Available at: <<https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/music/chilling-hints-in-linkin-park-lyrics-i-dont-like-my-mind-right-now/news-story/c179f54afb87f94ab5480aca0b34ae94>> [Accessed 11 February 2020].
12. History.com. 2020. Grunge Icon Kurt Cobain Is Found Dead Three Days After His Suicide. [online] Available at: <<https://www.history.com>this-day-in-history/kurt-cobain-is-found-dead>> [Accessed 15 March 2020].
13. Nytimes.com. 2020. Kurt Cobain: What To Read And Watch, 25 Years After The Nirvana Leader'S Death. [online] Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/05/arts/music/kurt-cobain-nirvana-death.html>> [Accessed 27 January 2020].

14. Vox. 2020. Depression And Suicide Risk Are Side Effects Of More Than 200 Common Drugs. [online] Available at: <<https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/6/14/17458726/depression-drugs-suicide-side-effect>> [Accessed 1 March 2020].
15. En.m.wikipedia.org. 2020. Singers Who Committed Suicide. [online] Available at: <[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Singers\\_who\\_committed\\_suicide](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Singers_who_committed_suicide)> [Accessed 11 February 2020].
16. Lists, C., 2020. Famous Musicians Who Committed Suicide. [online] Ranker. Available at: <<https://m.ranker.com/list/famous-musicians-who-committed-suicide/celebrity-lists?page=2>> [Accessed 30 January 2020].
17. The Recovery Village. 2020. What Chester Bennington'S Death Can Teach Us. [online] Available at: <<https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/mental-health/news/chester-benningtons-death/>> [Accessed 11 March 2020].
18. The Independent. 2020. Chester Bennington's Wife Opens Up About His Suicide In New Podcast. [online] Available at: <<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/chester-bennington-suicide-linkin-park-talinda-wife-podcast-abc-jennifer-ashton-a8912956.html>> [Accessed 23 January 2020].
19. NickiSwift.com. 2020. Chester Bennington's Tragic Real-Life Story. [online] Available at: <<https://www.nickiswift.com/159595/chester-benningtons-tragic-real-life-story/>> [Accessed 15 February 2020].
20. Psychology Today. 2020. The Suicidal Artist. [online] Available at: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/word-less/201904/the-suicidal-artist>> [Accessed 17 January 2020].
21. Stuff. 2020. Sad Music Can Be Dangerous To Those Suffering From Depression According To Studies. [online] Available at: <<https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/well-good/85328098/sad-music-and-depression-does-it-help>> [Accessed 6 March 2020].
22. The Independent. 2020. Chester Bennington Discusses His Depression In Final Interview: 'I Can Either Just Give Up And F\*cking Die Or I Can Fight'. [online] Available at: <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/chester-bennington-dead-death-depression-interview-suicide-last-final-linkin-park-a7853306.html>> [Accessed 19 February 2020].
23. Genius. 2020. Linkin Park – Numb. [online] Available at: <<https://genius.com/Linkin-park-numb-lyrics>> [Accessed 22 February 2020].
24. 2020. [online] Available at: <<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/23/us/talinda-bennington-suicide-town-hall-cnn/index.html> <https://www.simplypsychology.org/depression.html>> [Accessed 11 March 2020].