

BOOK REVIEW

# Finding Order In Disorder: A Bipolar Memoir by Ishaa Vinod Chopra, Om Books International India 2024, 172 pp.

***Aishe Debnath***

Department of Applied Psychology & Counselling Center,  
University of Mumbai.  
aishe.8494@gmail.com

In *Finding Order in Disorder: A Bipolar Memoir*, Ishaan Vinod Chopra takes readers on a deeply reflective journey, blending philosophical exploration with personal experience. The memoir opens with an evocative inquiry: “Am I the observer, or the bird that takes flight into the horizon? Am I a follower seated amongst the crowd, or am I a leader who takes a step forward and sets herself free?” This foundational question sets the tone for a narrative that is both a psychological and philosophical exploration of identity, resilience, and the quest for meaning in a tumultuous existence. Chopra’s exploration of bipolar disorder is not just a recounting of mental illness but a profound dialogue between self and society, drawing on the delicate balance between chaos and order, despair and hope. The title, *Finding Order in Disorder*, offers more than a personal reflection on mental illness—it encapsulates a broader inquiry into how individuals navigate a world that often feels unbalanced, yet simultaneously strive to create coherence in their experiences.

The memoir’s opening chapter, *Early Years: The Distant Rumbling of Thunder*, offers a poignant depiction of Ishaan’s childhood marked by emotional turbulence. While the seeds of bipolar disorder are present, they remain undiagnosed and misunderstood. This stage of Ishaan’s life mirrors Erikson’s psychosocial development theory, particularly the conflict between identity and role confusion, where her early emotional struggles reflect a fundamental quest for self-definition amidst the turmoil of undiagnosed mood dysregulation (Erikson, 1968).

In the chapter *Teenage Years: The Cracks Begin to Show*, Ishaq describes the intensification of her emotional turmoil, which remains largely unnoticed or misinterpreted. Her experiences resonate with Marsha Linehan's framework in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), which emphasizes emotional dysregulation as a core element of mental health struggles (Linehan, 1993). Ishaq's mood swings and emotional intensity during this time reflect the uncontrollable chaos described in DBT, a chaos that is invisible to those around her, particularly when the external support systems fail to address the underlying causes of her suffering.

One of the most striking moments in the memoir occurs in the chapter *Marriage, Domestic Violence, Divorce: Chaos Opens Its Ugly Mouth*. Here, Ishaq explores the complex intersection of bipolar disorder and domestic abuse. The emotional and physical abuse she endures exacerbates her mental health condition, creating a fertile ground for psychological fragmentation. Judith Herman's work on trauma offers a lens through which to understand Ishaq's experience. Herman (1992) explores how trauma, especially from intimate violence, disrupts the sense of self, often leading to dissociation and identity fragmentation—a theme that permeates Ishaq's narrative during this tumultuous period.

In contrast, *A New Dawn: Fresh Beginnings* marks Ishaq's decision to leave her toxic marriage and begin the arduous process of self-healing. This chapter resonates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly the drive for self-actualization, where autonomy becomes a critical step toward reclaiming one's identity (Maslow, 1943). By leaving the relationship, Ishaq takes a bold step toward self-discovery and autonomy, demonstrating how personal growth is not only shaped by external circumstances but by an internal resolve to change.

*The Many Meanings of Dance: Therapy, Coping Mechanism, Life* is another powerful chapter in which Ishaq turns to dance as a form of therapy and self-expression. Here, the concept of embodied cognition, which posits that the mind and body are interconnected in meaningful ways, is particularly relevant (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). Dance allows Ishaq to channel the emotional chaos of her mind into a controlled, expressive form, demonstrating how physical movement can impact mental well-being.

Ishaa's exploration of relationships in *Hello Rejection: A Return to the Dating Scene* delves into the psychological complexities of relational rejection. Drawing from Carl Rogers' person-centered therapy, which emphasizes unconditional positive regard, Ishaa struggles with self-acceptance amidst external rejection. This highlights the tension between self-worth and societal validation, a dynamic central to many individuals' mental health struggles (Rogers, 1961).

*Negotiating Family: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* explores Ishaa's complex familial relationships, calling to mind Murray Bowen's family systems theory. Bowen (1978) suggests that individuals cannot be fully understood in isolation from the family dynamics that shape them. Ishaa's portrayal of her familial relationships as a mix of love, dysfunction, and enmeshment illustrates the profound impact family systems have on mental health outcomes.

*Mise en Scene: The Madhouse* offers a critical look at the psychiatric institutions Ishaa encounters in India. Here, Michel Foucault's (1961) critique of psychiatric institutions in *Madness and Civilization* provides a useful framework. Foucault argued that psychiatric hospitals are not just spaces of care but sites of control and exclusion, where the mentally ill are marginalized and dehumanized. Ishaa's narrative reflects the contradictions inherent in these institutions, where necessary medical care is often accompanied by feelings of isolation and alienation.

By the time we reach *To My Own Rescue: Let Ishaa Help Ishaa*, Ishaa begins to turn inward, exploring the process of self-healing. This chapter reflects Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, which suggests that finding meaning in suffering is essential for overcoming it (Frankl, 1946). Ishaa's journey towards self-rescue raises critical questions about the nature of healing—can one truly recover in isolation, or is communal support necessary for healing?

In *Accept, Grow, Learn: Lessons for a Lifetime*, Ishaa reflects on her hard-won wisdom, a journey that aligns with the concept of post-traumatic growth as described by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004). Their work suggests that trauma, while deeply painful, also offers the potential for personal growth and transformation—a theme that permeates Ishaa's memoir. This raises an important philosophical

question: Is suffering necessary for growth, or can wisdom be found in the absence of pain?

*Finding a Voice: Notes to Myself* marks a pivotal moment in the memoir where Ishaa reclaims her voice and agency. Drawing on narrative psychology, which posits that the stories we tell ourselves shape our identities, Ishaa's writing becomes an act of empowerment, reclaiming control over her narrative (McAdams, 2001).

The memoir concludes with *Living with Gratitude: Holding On and Letting Go*, where Ishaa reflects on the importance of gratitude in her healing process. This resonates with the work of Martin Seligman (2002), who found that gratitude practices can significantly improve mental well-being. Ishaa's emphasis on gratitude provides a poignant message that even in the face of suffering, there are always elements worth appreciating.

*Finding Order in Disorder* is a compelling narrative that weaves together personal testimony with broader psychological, sociological, and philosophical reflections on mental illness, particularly bipolar disorder. By utilizing her lived experiences, Chopra offers a critical exploration of the complexities surrounding mental health, emphasizing how it intersects with societal expectations, personal identity, and institutional frameworks. The memoir highlights the nuanced struggles faced by individuals with bipolar disorder, and in doing so, contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse about mental health awareness in contemporary society.

In the current global context, Ishaa Chopra's memoir resonates profoundly as mental health receives increasing attention in both personal and professional settings. The narrative serves as a mirror to the challenges that individuals with bipolar disorder face in environments that prioritize emotional stability and productivity—two often contradictory ideals within the modern workplace ((Kuo et al., 2021; Monteiro, & Joseph, 2016)). Chopra's story invites critical reflection on the societal values of order, success, and emotional control, questioning the inherent stigma surrounding mental illness. This raises pertinent questions: What does it mean to have a "disorder" in a society that values uniformity and achievement? How does one reconcile emotional vulnerability with a culture that often views it as a weakness (Goffman, 1963)? These interrogations deepen the reader's

understanding of the ways mental health challenges are often misinterpreted and marginalized within society.

Moreover, the memoir addresses the role of privilege and socioeconomic status in accessing mental health care. The disparity in resources and opportunities for healing between different socioeconomic groups is a critical lens through which the narrative is examined. As studies have shown, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often encounter significant barriers to mental health care, such as financial constraints and lack of access to quality services (Yu & Williams, 1991). This raises the question: Could someone from a different socioeconomic background have had the same opportunities for healing and self-understanding? Chopra's reflection on this issue underscores the intersectionality between mental health, social class, and access to care, highlighting a systemic challenge that continues to persist across various contexts (Williams & Mohammed, 2009).

The memoir's relevance is further accentuated within the framework of contemporary mental health awareness. Scholars such as Marsha Linehan, who has worked extensively on dialectical behavior therapy for individuals with borderline personality disorder, and Erving Goffman's seminal work on stigma, provide theoretical underpinnings that help contextualize Chopra's narrative within broader psychological and sociological discourses (Linehan, 1993; Goffman, 1963). By drawing on these frameworks, Ishaq's memoir contributes to the growing body of literature on the stigmatization of mental health, calling for a shift in how society perceives individuals living with mental illness.

A critical aspect of the memoir is the genre in which it is situated. The term "memoir" traditionally refers to personal reflections written by individuals who have experienced significant life events, typically after those events have passed (Couser, 2011). However, Chopra's relatively young age raises the question: Is it premature for her to reflect on her experiences in the form of a memoir, or does this challenge our conventional understanding of the genre? As Couser (2011) notes, memoirs can be written at any stage of life, especially when the purpose is not merely to recount events but to process and make meaning of one's experiences. This distinction invites readers to reconsider the limitations of the

memoir form and expand its definition to include personal narratives that are ongoing, rather than completed.

In conclusion, Isha Chopra's memoir not only offers an intimate and deeply personal account of living with bipolar disorder but also serves as a critical cultural and social text that challenges contemporary understandings of mental illness. By linking individual experience with broader social structures, Chopra invites readers to consider the implications of mental health in today's society. The memoir contributes to ongoing conversations about the stigmatization of mental illness, the role of privilege in accessing care, and the importance of empathy and understanding in both personal and professional settings. In doing so, it provides a poignant reflection on how mental health intersects with societal expectations and raises important questions about identity, disorder, and the potential for healing.

## References:

- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. Jason Aronson Inc.
- Couser, G. T. (2011). *Memoir: An introduction*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB12828886>
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Foucault, M. (1961). *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason*. Pantheon.
- Frankl, V. E. (1946). *Man's search for meaning*. Beacon Press.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Penguin Books.
- Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence--from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Kuo, S., Chang, Y., Wang, T., Tseng, H., Huang, C., Chen, P. S., Lane, H., Yang, Y. K., & Lu, R. (2021). Impairment in emotional intelligence may be Mood-Dependent in bipolar I and bipolar II disorders. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.597461>
- Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of borderline personality disorder*. Guilford Press.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- McAdams, D. P. (2021). Narrative identity and the life story. In O. P. John & R. W. Robins (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (4th ed., pp. 122–141). The Guilford Press.

Monteiro, E., & Joseph, J. (2023). A Review on the Impact of Workplace Culture on Employee Mental Health and Well-Being. *International Journal of Case Studies in Business, IT, and Education*. 291-317. 10.47992/IJCSBE.2581.6942.0274.

Rogers, C. (1961). *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Free Press.

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). Target Article: "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence". *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(1), 1-18. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1501\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1501_01)

Varela, F. J., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1991). *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. MIT Press.

Williams, D. R., & Mohammed, S. A. (2009). Discrimination and Racial Disparities in Health: Evidence and Needed Research. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 32, 20-47.

Yu, Y., Williams, D.R. (1999). Socioeconomic Status and Mental Health. In: Aneshensel, C.S., Phelan, J.C. (eds) *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*. *Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research*. Springer, Boston, MA. [https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36223-1\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36223-1_8)

