

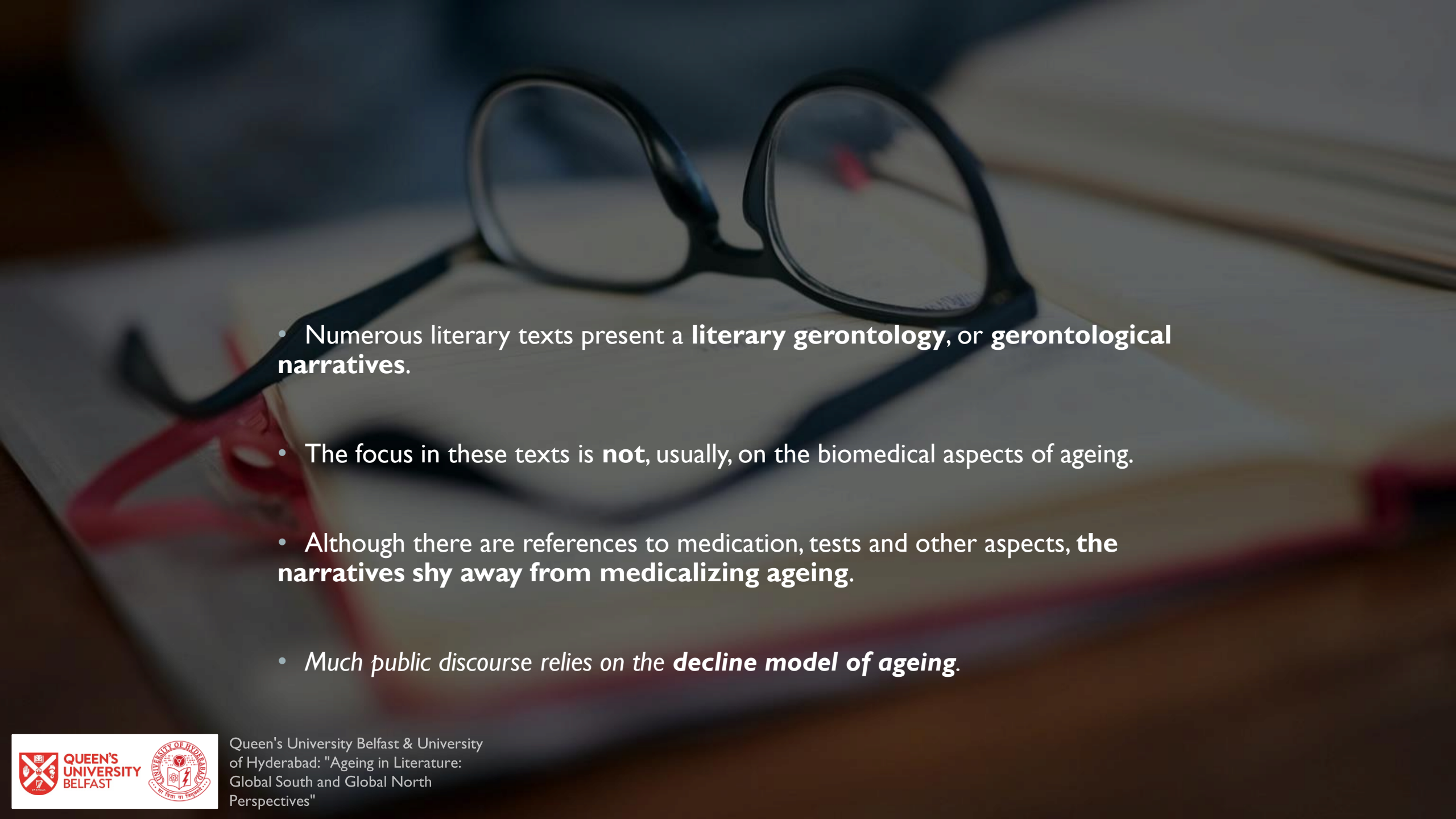


# CONTEXTS FOR THE STUDY OF AGEING IN LITERATURE: PERSPECTIVES FROM INDIA

- **Contexts** for the study of **ageing in India/Indian Writing** (as a subset of the Global South literatures).
- There is now a **booming public discourse** in India on the **'greying'** of the population. Regular reports on:
  - **ageing in cities** with the migration of younger generations,
  - the **'problem'** of old age,
  - advertisements for **assisted living homes**,
  - **pandemic and ageing**,
  - questions of **care**,
  - the changing nature of the **'family'**.

- Public discourse on ageing (contd):
  - From the medicalization of ageing to a clear emphasis on **‘ageing with dignity’**, the **rights of the aged**.
  - There is also the public discourse on **spaces for the aged** – whether safe homes or pedestrian-friendly spaces in communities.
  - Stories of **elder-abuse** are common in public discourse (Mander, 2015).
  - Massive amounts of **data** are also available now.
  - For a list of resources see:

<https://ucvulnerabilitystudies.uohyd.ac.in/resources-for-ageing-in-india-an-annotated-bibliography/>

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- Numerous literary texts present a **literary gerontology**, or **gerontological narratives**.
  - The focus in these texts is **not**, usually, on the biomedical aspects of ageing.
  - Although there are references to medication, tests and other aspects, **the narratives shy away from medicalizing ageing**.
  - *Much public discourse relies on the **decline model of ageing**.*

## Indian fiction that deals with ageing:

- Rohinton Mistry. *Family Matters*.
- Upamanyu Banerjee. *The Last Burden*.
- ---. *Weight Loss*.
- ---. *Way to Go*.
- Anuradha Roy. *The Folded Earth*.
- Ranjit Lal. *Our Nana was a Nutcase*.

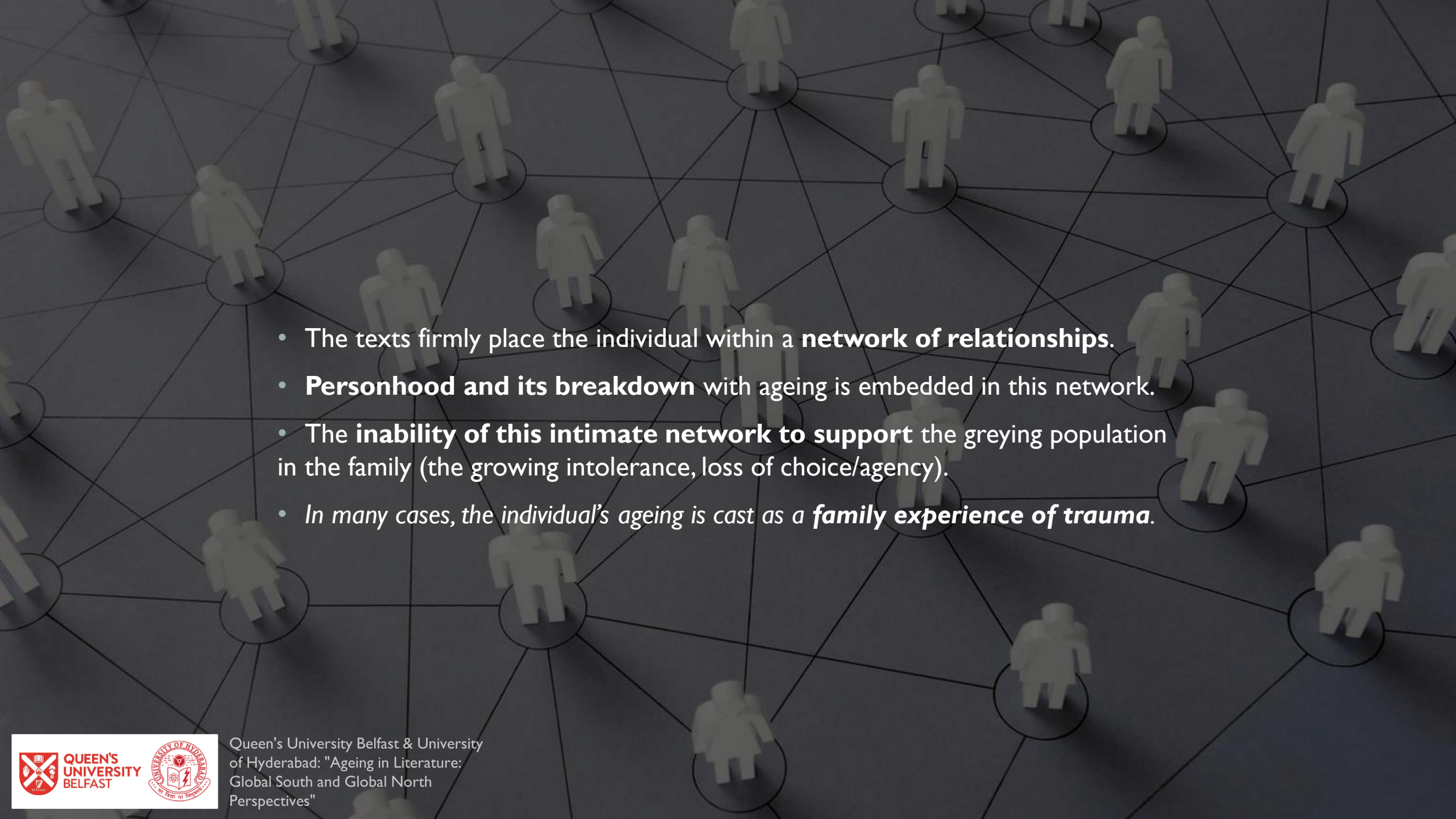
- Both public discourse and literary texts also foreground the **financial aspects of old age**, particularly its effect on the family's economy.
- Contemporary public discourse has considerable advice on **insurance and health services costs** for aging persons, building on the assumption and fear that there will never be enough financial stability for the later years.

- The focus is on the **social aspects** of the aged and the ageing.
- This means, the focus is not on the individual but the **social settings** in which the individual ages, such as the family.
- *There is an **implicit critique of the family system**, even as the texts suggest that the family remains the best option for the care of the aged.*
- *Family is represented as a **recuperative space**.*

- Public discourses, particularly advertisements, focus on the **heteronormative family**, with one set of older persons in the picture.
- These continue to emphasize implicitly the **necessity of the family structure** where the older people are taken care of. The older persons are represented as **necessary** for the grandchildren, for instance, **wise, participatory** (in the everyday life of the family).
- Debates and accounts of **institutionalization of the greying population** have also appeared in the last two decades.
- **Literary texts** like Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* (2002) study the impact of ageing on the entire family, **from care-giving to behaviour** (the cantankerous behaviour of the older person, for example) and the **dynamics within the family**. Some of the literature also focuses on **family expectations** from the ageing persons/persons with 'chronic forgetting' (Stephen Post's term for dementia), where these expectations often exclude them from the family.



- Ageing's problems in these texts are attributed not solely to medical conditions (dementia, degenerative disorders) but to the **failure of cultural systems and processes**.
- The **family** ought to be the **first observers of the deterioration of the individual** – the symptoms of age-related conditions are first noted by the family.
- The belief that grow-up children should care for their older parents just as their parents cared for them when they were children is implicit in both public discourse and literature - the use of the term '**sewa**', meaning service, in this context, highlights this connotation of **duty, responsibility and service**.

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- The background of the slide is a dark grey network diagram. It consists of numerous small, light grey human figures standing on circular nodes. These nodes are interconnected by a web of thin, light grey lines, creating a complex, interconnected network that symbolizes relationships and social connections.
- The texts firmly place the individual within a **network of relationships**.
  - **Personhood and its breakdown** with ageing is embedded in this network.
  - The **inability of this intimate network to support** the greying population in the family (the growing intolerance, loss of choice/agency).
  - *In many cases, the individual's ageing is cast as a **family experience of trauma**.*

- Mistry, Rohinton. *Family Matters*. McLelland and Stewart, 2002.
- Lal, Ranjit. *Our Nana was a Nutcase*. Red Turtle-Rupa, 2015.
- Banerjee, Upamanyu. *The Last Burden*. Faber and Faber, 1993.
- ---. *Weight Loss*. Viking, 2006.
- ---. *Way to Go*. Penguin, 2011.
- Roy, Anuradha. *The Folded Earth*. Maclehorse Press, 2012.
- Brijnath, Bianca. *Unforgotten: Love and the culture of dementia care in India*. Berghahn, 2014.
- Mander, Harsh. 'Neglect and Abuse: The Reality of India's Elderly People'. *Hindustan Times* 2 March 2015.

<https://harshmander.in/neglect-and-abuse-the-reality-of-indias-elderly-people/>