



Disability is Not an Inability- A study of Sharon M. Draper's

Out of My Mind

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Abstract

Disability Literature is a subject that focuses on the meaning, nature and consequences of disability. Disability studies deals with the attitude of the society towards people with physical, emotional and intellectual challenges. This paper explores the trauma of a young girl who wishes to be loved and respected for who she is with special reference to the fiction *Out of My Mind*. The protagonist Melody Brook's quest for identity helps her to live life to the fullest despite of cerebral palsy. As life becomes a tear and smile for her she chooses technology and education to empower herself and attempts to write her autobiography. Melody's resilience and urge to fight her life helps her to overcome the stereotypes of the society that tries to marginalizes her. The paper focuses on the significance of education and the need to accept and respect people regardless of their differences.

Key words: disability, stereotypes, education, cerebral palsy.

Disability is regarded as some kind of restriction or obstacle that limits people from performing certain tasks. Disability literature attempts to analyse and understand the restrictions imposed upon disabled people within their family and society. Disability studies voice for the disabled against the stereotypes of the society that subvert the disabled community. Tracking back from the history the society considers disability as a dishonour and is often associated with evil, sin and curse. People with disability is often excluded from the society that looks disability as a special category. Moreover, the society has the mentality that people with disability have to be treated differently. The modern medical field break off the stereotypes of the society by



considering disability as an impairment that can be cured through advance improvement in medical field. Disabled people should not be underestimated because they have talents inspire of their limitations. Disabled people are in no way inferior to the "normal" people and they excel in many fields. Lennard J. Davis claims the constructed normalcy in *Disability Studies Reader* as “The problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the problem of the disabled person” (1).

The present paper examines Sharon M. Draper's fiction *Out of My Mind*. Sharon M. Draper is an educator and an accomplished writer. She was born in 1952, United States. Her books have received honours including the Coretta Scott King Award. Her historical novel *The Copper Sun* (2006) received the Ohion Award for Young Adult Literature. The central theme of her works include African-American experiences, racism and disability. The fiction *Out of My Mind* is narrated from the perspective of an eleven-year-girl, Melody Brooks who is born with cerebral palsy, a neurological disorder that limits her from speaking and having control over her movements. The novel highlights the plight of Melody Brooks and her struggle to regain strength and confidence to lead a normal life inspite of her disability. The fact is that her physique does not cooperate with her like many abled children. But she is gifted with a photographic memory "I'm pretty sure I have a photographic memory" (19). Melody's family is extremely influential as they encourage her by offering strength and confidence to face challenges and adversity throughout her life. People who encounter her believe that she is not engaged with the world. In fact, it is a prejudice inflicted on her by the society. Melody's major source of inspiration is Mrs. Violet because unlike others her approach makes Melody to gain freedom and normalcy. Melody's familial bond with her near and dear ones help her to enjoy the world fully. Melody's parents enroll her in a school where she gets along with "normal" people. Hence she empowers herself through education. Initially chances are denied for Melody to explore herself as she couldn't express her thoughts. Melody's mentor Catherine recognizes her ability by giving her an opportunity to include herself in the quiz team. Melody's extreme intelligence is revealed when the team get qualified for the finals only because of her. Melody's excellence in academics makes



her unique among her peers. Yet there are instances where she is excluded for her disability. The prejudice of the society is revealed that her classmates betrays her even though she has given a change to attend the quiz program. Intentionally she is excluded thinking that she is incapable to cope up with the climatic change. Though it seems to shatter her dreams she gains will power to overcome the disastrous event. For the first time people who celebrated Melody for her intelligence betrays her for her disability. The Medi-Talker provides Melody the key to communicate and express her thoughts rushing in her mind. Thereby introduces her to the verbal world "Deep within me words pile in huge drifts. Mountains of phrases and sentences and connected ideas" (2). Melody's resilience to withstand the stereotypes of the society brings a promising and hopeful image in the end when she attempts to write her autobiography in the computer with her thumb. She exclaims "This is going to take a while, so much is stuffed inside my mind. I have lots to say and just one thumb to say it with" (413).

The writer adopts stream of consciousness technique and brings out the thought process of words which assemble in Melody's mind. The author intentionally narrates the novel from Melody's point of view thus presenting her as a voice of the speechless, the disabled. Melody's determination and faith prevents herself to be identified with cerebral palsy. Throughout her life she never allows anyone to pity her instead wants to be accepted as a person like many others. Though there are narratives about independences and social model, the society has not grasped it and is not willing to accept them as normal. Melody's capability to establish her identity exposes the hidden talent of the disabled people. But the bitter fact is that they remain unheard and unnoticed. In most cases they are forced to act according to the unwritten prejudice of the society. This paper also stresses the advancement of technology in empowering disabled. All the dreams and passions that have been hidden in her mind for a long period have been revealed by the Medi-Talker. The heart touching moment in the novel is that when Melody finally speaks to her parents and tells them that she loves them.

I type very carefully and push the button to make the machine speak. Hi Dad. Hi Mom. I am so happy. Mom gets all teary-eyed and her nose gets red she is



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looking at me soft and gooey. When I think about it, I realize I have never, ever said any words directly to my parents. So I push a couple of buttons and the machine speaks the word I've never been able to say I love you. (203)

In an autobiographical work *One Little Finger*, Malini Chips accomplishes her identity despite of cerebral palsy. She uses technology as a companion and emerge as an author. She remarks "I was now more adept on the computer. My power of communication has improve considerably. My one little finger was the power house of strength" (139). The paper emphasizes the need to understand the disabilities from the perspective of disabled. Through the description of certain characters it stresses the importance of being humane towards people with disabilities. Moreover, with the aid of science and technology the disabled can empower themselves in accomplishing their dreams.

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