

# Disability Studies And Literature: An Overview

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***Abstract: Various types of impairments of human beings living in the modern world is one of the notable aspects when it comes to discerning certain traits which primarily guide and regulate the basic phenomenon of living in this world. There are numerous individuals on earth who suffer from or rather have been suffering from some specific hindrances so to say which not only sort of cripple them in their path to fulfilling their dreams and aspirations but also, at the same time act as serious detriments in their sound personal growth and development as well. Literature has always been the mirror of human beings and their accomplishments. There are many notable fictions which deal with the nuances of disability of individuals and also the associated studies. What it brings to light is that disability is quite normal in terms of some kind of abnormality of human beings but then, it is the various mechanism of the society which rather portrays the same in a quite negative light. This paper is an attempt in order to make a critical evaluative study of the ramifications of disability in the field of literature. In the very process, the paper also deals with the tenets of disability studies in general.***

***Keywords: abnormality, cripple, disability, impairments, society***

## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The field of literature is immensely vast when it comes to the exposition of the contents it both encapsulates and amalgamates. There have been different shades and shadows of depictions of myriad nuances which do not necessarily pertain to one specific topic or theme. It is the encapsulation of each and every attribute of the human society at large that, in a nutshell, greatly forms the entire broader core of the word literature in general. Talking about the all-encompassing nature of literature, it would really be unfair not to state precisely the inclusion of the traits of human beings because literature is nothing but the precise and sheer portrayal of the mundane society of the four-footed being called as human beings. In relation to the different traits of human beings, there are also certain features which are generally considered as having some kind of negative effects. Those impairments, if they can be called as, greatly hamper both the psychological and the physical state of a particular individual when it comes to fulfilling the various dreams and aspirations of the humans.

The field of study which is associated with various kind of disabilities of human beings is generally seen to be one of the integral parts of the human world. There is the involvement of general concerns for those who are affected coupled with utmost care which sometimes even give way to empathising with an individual who has been inflicted with some kind of a disability. And all these very well and truly find accurate representation in numerous fictional pieces in literature. There is no better place than literature to make an evaluation of the various kinds of situations which a disabled person has to undergo from time to time. To

make a rudimentary understanding of the concept of disability, the preliminary definition given by the World Health Organization (WHO) can very easily be considered. According to the W.H.O., “Disability is not an attribute of an individual, but rather a complex collection of conditions, many of which are created by the social environment. Hence the management of the problem requires social action, and it is the collective responsibility of society at large to make the changes necessary for full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of social life” (2001, p. 28).

The above definition sums up the basic idea which is inherent in the concept of various studies which are associated with any kind of disability for that matter. If there are traits of an individual which are disabled finding expression in one of the important functions, there are some kind of physical organs which are shown to be not normal in the other. After all, these are all conditions which really come out to the forefront when it comes to understanding the basic intricacies at the level of a particular society. Talking about society, there is also one very important negative picture in relation to the society when it comes to comprehending the studies associated with disability at the level of a society. Thus basic detrimental effect is generally seen in the field of the very process of construction of the very phenomenon of disability to be something a quite out of the world rather than treating the same as a pretty much normal attribute of an individual. So, even in this field, there is the process of the construction of a particular form of abnormality which further relegates the affected person to an even marginalised position.

“Disability culture is the difference between being alone, isolated, and individuated with a physical, cognitive, emotional or sensory difference that in our society invites discrimination and reinforces that isolation – the difference between all that and being in community. Naming oneself part of a larger group, a social movement or a subject position in modernity can help to focus energy, and to understand that solidarity can be found – precariously, in improvisation, always on the verge of collapse.” (Kuppers, 2011, p.109)

## **2. OBJECTIVES:**

The following objectives will be envisaged for the research work:

1. To depict the subtle nuances of the various studies which are associated with the aspect of disability of an individual. This basic objective drives home the point that the idea of disability is something to do the inherent creation of an individual who, most likely, by birth, tends to be coping with some kind of deformity or abnormality which renders inferior to others.
2. To portray that the concept of disability which is associated with an individual is very much social in nature. This very objective also rams the death knell to the idea that there are more personal attributes which are involved in a disabled individual.
3. To probe deep into the different intricacies of the idea of disability there proving the point that there is a deep mechanism of societal construction which is involved in the subtle portrayal of the same to be something negative.
4. To depict the idea that different literary pieces of writing, in one way or the other, deal with some kind of disability of individuals and thus reflect the same in the larger picture of the society at large. As if the texts help the disabled individuals to get both reflected and noticed in the society to put it in the nutshell. This very phenomenon echoes the idea of an author which was stated by Michel Foucault,

“The ‘author-function’ is tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine and articulate the realm of discourses; it does not appear in any uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by spontaneous

attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy.” (1977, p.24)

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research is planned to be based on the following methods:

1. The research is primarily based on qualitative approach. It focuses on the general critical analysis of the intricacies of the studies associated with disability in general. This method abundantly helps uncover the intricacies of the research objectives.
2. The research is descriptive in design. So the descriptive outlook paved the way for bringing to the fore the hypothetical assumptions.
3. Evaluative analysis of the basic idea of disability in general is another key method for coming to a conclusion of the research objectives. The idea of disability is always hidden under the guise of the side which is associated with some kind of negativity in the society at large.
4. To study the immensely pivotal role which is played by different literary pieces in terms of dealing with portraying the different issues and intricacies associated with the idea of a disabled man. Adopting this method is of utmost benefit because the research objectives of the paper deal with studying the nuances which, in general, encapsulate the basic premise of the idea of disability.

**Hypothesis:** The paper will use the basic hypothesis that different prominent pieces of fiction are of notable importance as they not only uncover the otherwise hidden and grey areas of disability studies but also, at the same time, make the issues related to the studies of a disabled man a part of the mainstream society at large. Moreover, the paper also has the hypothetical proposition of the fact that the issues of disability studies are generally social in nature more than personal. The research also assumes that it is sheer construction of the society at large which in some way or the other casts a cold eye to the ramifications of disability at large and it is something which is really common in terms of the general presence in the society.

### 4. DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS:

“Handicapped people remain outcasts around the world living in shame and squalor around the world among populations lacking not only in resources to help them but also in understanding. And with their numbers growing rapidly, their plight is getting worse...

The normal perception is that nothing can be done for the disabled children. This has to do with prejudiced and old-fashioned thinking that this punishment comes from God, some evil spirits or magic... We have a catastrophic human rights solution.... They (disabled people) are a group without power (Helander, 1993, UN Press Conference)

This is how Einar Helander described the disabled people in general. When it comes to attaining any sort of power, this is a group which is really poor. They are utter powerless both literally and figuratively whenever any sort of discussion in relation to power of the disabled persons come to the picture. In the general scenario, any individual who is suffering from some kind of disability in the society is in one way or the other suffering from double marginalization. The simple reason behind this is that there is also a sense of inferiority complex which is associated with any disabled individual for that matter and this sense of

inferiority complex greatly gets heightened when the inflicted individual suffers terribly at the hands of the society in terms of being given a relegated position.

In greatly comprehending the different complicated ramifications of the studies which are associated with disability studies in the field of literature, the aspect of discourse should always be considered because it is through discursive writings and practices that a disabled individual is being portrayed to the society at large. There is also the process of normalisation and also standardisation of the bodies of human beings which are greatly connected to the process of studying disability studies using the critical lens of evaluating its nuances. In the words of Swartz (2007), “disability has not been adopted as a cross cutting issue and the lack of commitment and execution provide reasons to the failure of mainstreaming to deliver” (p. 33).

One of the most important aspect which is pretty much evident in the field of disability studies and literature in general is the inherent connection between the nuances of disability studies and various literary theories like post-colonialism, feminism etc. these literary theories greatly ramify the otherwise hidden intricacies of the same. There are various notable fictions which can be seen in the larger corpus of both English literature and Indian English literature that contain the depictions of certain disabled characters or disabled individuals for that matter. *Family Matters* by Rohinton Mistry and *Shame* by Salman Rushdie are two very famous Indian English novel which deal with the issues of disability in literature. These novel are a clear testimony to the fact that disability is not a disease as such more it is more of a social condition which longs for amiable behaviour by fellow beings.

The relegated position which a disabled individual suffers from is one of the heart-wrenching issues that need serious addressal when it comes to the treatment of disability and disabled individuals in an equal manner. Since time immemorial, with the inception of fictions and fictional depictions, there have been many characters who have very painfully bear the brunt of some kind of disabilities. What this does is that there is the process of creation of a position which is utter subordinated position. There is never a clearer picture of the disabled person in the society. In relation to this issue, the aspect of the construction of the very process of disability to be something really not entertained and something to look down upon. In relation to the various processes of politics which are involved in the studies related to disability in the field of postcolonial literature, Clare Barker stands as a towering colossus. According to her,

“postcolonial writers are equally concerned with the complexity of disability as lived experience. It focuses on constructions of normalcy, the politics of medicine and healthcare, and questions of citizenship and belonging in order to demonstrate how progressive health and disability politics often emerge organically from writers’ postcolonial concerns.” (2012, p.43)

The above statement is one of the staggering remarks which is associated with the inherent width that the studies related to disability is associated with. Even the group of postcolonial studies writer have been associating with the studies of the same which only reiterate the fact how widespread the very notion is in terms of its diverse nature. There are concerns associated with the basic factors of subjective presence when it comes to postcolonial studies and these writers greatly deal with the same so that the basic attribute of existential presence of an individual who is disabled comes out to the forefront. Also, what it does is that it reiterates the concerns which are associated with the ontological belonging of an individual to speak in a larger manner.

Kim Q. Hall has made some very much serious remarks in relation to the field of feminist disability studies in the following manner,

“Feminist disability theory engages several of the fundamental premises of critical theory: (1) that representation structures reality, (2) that the margins define the center,

(3) that gender (or disability) is a way of signifying relationships of power, (4) that human identity is multiple and unstable, and (5) that all analysis and evaluation has political implications.” (20)

Even in the field of feminism and feminist studies, the concerns related to the upliftment of disabled persons have risen in leaps and bounds. What is really important in this regard is to understand is the fact that there is always the process of defying which is easily seen in the case of an individual who is not that normal in the society. What the process of defying indicates towards is that there is the process of reluctance of a disabled individual in the society and here comes the act of defiance to the core. Also, the ideas of being in the margins more than the center can become easily valid in this regard.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

All told, it can easily be substantiated by saying that there is always the involvement of some kind of empathising attitude with a person who is disabled in nature. What various pieces of fiction in terms of literature do is that they not only bring in the realisations of the process of acceptance but also, at the same time, grant a major boost to the very idea of subjective existence of such an individual. There is always an interplay which a particular literary text foregrounds and that interplay is precisely the dwelling on the various attributes of the disability studies and the attributes of an individual in general.

Various literary pieces are always seen to be very much essential in terms of the homogeneity they possess when it comes to the depiction of a disabled character in general. Although the instances of disability can be different at times, the core concerns of developing a heart of embracing such an individual always remains at the top. There is a great process of open acceptance which any literary text for that matter tries to portray. Girish Karnad's *Broken Images*, Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, R. L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* all these great masterpieces are pretty much echoing one focal point of accepting the disabled persons in the society to be a part of one among the normal beings. What these literary texts in one way or the other reiterate is that these enable us become bit more open and also broad minded because at the end of the end, whether an individual is disabled or not, it all boils down to the basic tenet of being a human.

This is precisely the role which every literary piece dealing with disability studies for that matter echo at the top of their voices. There is the process of acceptance which such texts echo a great deal alongside the concerns which are associated with the nuances of subjective presence. Literature, as always, paves the way forward in order to make a broad and serious foray into the diverse ways of amalgamation and attribution of a disabled individual.

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- [6] WHO (2001). *Disability Including Prevention, Management and Rehabilitation*. 9th Plenary Meeting. Geneva: World Health Assembly.
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