

RADIANCE OF DAWN: A STUDY OF TERESA MEDEIROS'

YOURS UNTIL DAWN

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a vital field which touches every part of the society and is concerned with human values. It is indeed true that literature cannot be distinguished from the human beings as it is a mirror of nature. As literature is a combination of fact and fiction, it covers the imaginative and supernatural or fictional worlds and characters as well. The study of literature is not only the study and evaluation of poems, novels, short stories, and plays, but also the study of ideas, issues and difficulties which arise in the creation and interpretation of them.

The significant purpose of literature is to portray how man is able to face the societal challenges and pitfalls and how he strives to find possible solutions to the prevailing problems.

This paper aims to throw light on the paradigm of subaltern literature, with a special attention to the disabled community. This article also explores the trials and tribulations of the visually challenged people in their day-to-day lives and it encourages the so called non-disabled to lend helping hands to the disabled when they are in the need of them.

KEYWORDS: *Post-Colonialism, Subaltern, Black Rights Movement, Disability, Inclusive Education, Teresa Medeiros, Visually Impaired, Seclusion, Sympathy & Kindness*

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is a vital field which touches every part of the society and is concerned with human values. It is indeed true that literature cannot be distinguished from the human beings as it is a mirror of nature. As literature is a combination of fact and fiction, it covers the imaginative and supernatural or fictional worlds and characters as well. The study of literature is not only the study and evaluation of poems, novels, short stories and plays, but also the study of ideas, issues and difficulties which arise in the creation and interpretation of them.

The significant purpose of literature is to portray how man is able to face the societal challenges and pitfalls and how he strives to find possible solutions to the prevailing problems. Some writers like John Keats move one step further and take their readers in the imaginative world through their poems like Ode to a Nightingale in order to alleviate or forget the pains of the real world.

In an interview with Gowri Ramnarayan in The Hindu, Homi J. Bhabha observes, "The purpose of post-colonialism is to allow people to understand their lives, the lives of others and their lives in relation to others." Understanding one's own life, other's lives and analyzing one's life in relation to other's lives form the crux of

post-colonial literature. In the book, *Perspectives on Post-colonial Literature*, Raghav quotes the views of Gandhi in this regard. “Post-colonialism today aims at moving post-nationalism i.e. towards an inter civilization alliance against institutionalized suffering and oppression” (125).

Subaltern studies occupy a significant place in the study of literature. The word subaltern means lower in rank or secondary. Both the fiction and non-fiction that discuss the trials and tribulations of the subaltern people like, women, minority and disabled come under the preview of subaltern literature. The chief intention of subaltern literature is to bring out the oppression and the challenges faced by the subaltern communities.

Tracing the history of the subaltern literature, people belonging to the minority sections of the society became the subjects in the initial stages. Bhama’s *Karukku* is one of the best examples that documents the miseries of the minority society. Then the suppression and sufferings of women came into the scene with Arundhati Rai’s *The God of Small Things*. The twentieth century witnesses more of such similar issues with the voice of the disabled trying to be heard. The rise of feminism, the struggle of the working-class people and black civil rights movements help to accentuate the voice of the disabled. The progress of disability studies could be an interdisciplinary study as it involves different fields.

People with disabilities, voice against their oppression and many movements supporting the disabled have been sprouting since the 1950s. For instance, the first Disabled People’s International (DPI) World Congress was held in Singapore in 1981. The groups came from their national contexts to find a global response to disablement. DPI has provided an essential hub for the sharing of campaign successes and raising of transnational issues such as inclusive education, employment rights and poverty eradication. A legacy of DPI can be found across the globe through the presence of Centers for Independent Living that offers not only services to disabled people but also work for their equity. Moreover, regional organizations such as Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability emerged to tackle local issues faced by disabled people in some of the poorest countries. This includes community-based rehabilitation, which brings together educational, health and social care practitioners as part of a community-based response to impairment and disability, literacy programs and family support. In the Global North, such as the Nordic and Scandinavian countries, Canada and the United States, the disabled people’s movement has been heavily influenced by the self-advocacy movement organized by people with the label of intellectual disabilities. Organizations of the Blind were particularly strong in the countries like India, participating in hunger strikes to push for anti-discriminatory legislation.

Britain saw the establishment of the United Kingdom’s Disabled People’s Council, formerly the British Council of Organizations of Disabled People, which has grown from the early political impact of organizations such as UPIAS (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation) in the 1970s. Disabled people’s organizations have enacted grassroots institutional change through the delivery of disability equality training courses, educating organizations to adopt enabling philosophies and practices. This has created a new form of labor for disabled people.

While a surfeit of helping professions has grown around disability, disabled people have had a huge impact on professional, cultural and political life. It is true that disability activism continues to influence disability studies. The mantra ‘Nothing about us, without us’ promotes representation and ownership. The priorities of national disabled people’s organizations illuminate political considerations about a nation’s welfare system, citizenship and the perceived importance of disability in comparison with other socioeconomic inequalities. Goodley in the book *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* brings in the opinions of critics regarding disability.

A body or mind that is disabled is also one defined by race, gender, trains/national location, age, sexuality, religion and class. Disability, as Gerard Goggin put it, is imbricated with other categories of difference, experiences of marginality and forms of political activism. Disability studies contribute to what Deborah Marks described as 'The growing pluralism in social theory that attends to this human diversity.'

Since literature is a body of the social, cultural, political and economic portrayal of the man and the society in which he lives, disability studies have become an interdisciplinary subject in the field of literature. Both the fiction and non-fiction have been written for the disabled sometimes by the disabled. People with disabilities have written autobiographies to inspire both the disabled and non-disabled communities. The Autobiography of Hellen Keller is one such example. Similarly, biographies were written on the lives of successful disabled people. For instance, Boswell has written a detailed biography on the famous English literary critic, Samuel Johnson who was partially blind. As the days passed, many writers began to create their fictions with disabled persons as their protagonists and characters.

Yours Until Dawn is one of the novels written by the famous American writer Teresa Medeiros based on the visually impaired protagonist, Fairchild Park. Teresa Medeiros is a United States award-winning romance novelist with more than eight million books in print. She wrote her first novel when she was 21. Since then, she has published 23 books. Before becoming a full-fledged writer, she worked as a nurse. According to her official biography, she presently lives in Kentucky with her husband.

Till date, all of her books have been on The New York Time's Best Seller list. She is a two-time Fantasy, Futuristic and Paranormal Romance Writers' PRISM Award winner and two-time recipient of the Waldenbooks Award for bestselling fiction. Additionally, she is a charter member of the Romance Writers of America Honor Roll. She is also a member of Kentucky Romance Writers and Novelists, Inc.

Yours Until Dawn is one of the significant novels written by Teresa Medeiros. According to the Historical Romance Club, "YOURS UNTIL DAWN is absolutely marvelous! Medeiros' writing is pure magic. And never was there a more perfect ending. YOURS UNTIL DAWN will keep you reading until the wee hours of the morning." According to Oakland Daily Press, "Medeiros does everything right in YOURS UNTIL DAWN. It's a book that readers will remember fondly for a long time."

The plot of the novel goes like this: Gabriel Fairchild joined the Royal Navy to prove to Cecily that he was the man she wanted him to be. He came back wounded, blind and an emotional wreck. Cecily was overcome with guilt that she had driven him to war to prove himself as he had almost died at sea. She changed her name to Samantha and without his knowledge sought employment through Gabriel's father to nurse Gabriel back to health and to teach him to adjust to a life of blindness. She went to Fairchild Park to find him so absorbed in self-pity that he had become just short of a monster. He had ordered all the drapes closed, seldom shaved and eating with his fingers. He had already driven away two nurses: an old lady and a maid. Determined to restore his confidence, Samantha set out to teach him – how to accept his blindness and yet be civilized. She aired out his mansion and had it cleaned; the furniture was rearranged so he would not fall over it. She taught him to use a walking stick and to eat using spoons and forks. The staff of the mansion got involved in it and he learned to dance again. Gradually they fell in love.

The general notion of people with disabilities and visually impaired in particular is portrayed clearly in the novel *Yours Until Dawn*. People with disabilities are considered to be burdened. The idea could be explained in two ways:

disabled people consider themselves as burdens to their families and on the other hand, the society labels them as burdens. The former idea can be applied to the protagonist of the novel, Fair Child Park. He says, “You know as well as I that a blind has no place in our society unless begging on some street corner or locked away in a lunatic asylum. I’ll never be anything more than a burden and an object of pity to my family and anyone else Unfortunate enough to love me” (235). These words of Fair Child Park bring out his internal trauma created by the people around him. It is clear that Fair Child Park is not blind from birth; rather he became blind during his 20s. Soon after he became blind, the society, including his parents began to sympathize with him. This is the main reason which amplified his internal worries.

Parents of people with disabilities sometimes fail to accept their children and hesitate to introduce them to their acquaintances. Some parents go one step further by secluding them or locking them up inside a house or a room away from the eyes of the society in order to maintain their power and prestige. The same condition is seen in Gabriel Fair Child Park’s life. After becoming blind, he has been sent to the countryside home where he had spent his childhood days so that he could be kept away from the eyes of the society. This can be understood through the character of Mrs. Beckwith, a loyal servant of Fair Child Park. She says, “He has his own town house in London, of course, given the cruel nature of his injuries, his family thought it might be easier for him to recuperate at his childhood home away from society’s prying eyes. Easier for who? For him or for them?. (15) Fair Child Park’s parents justify their action of sending him away from London by saying that it would be easier for him to navigate through his childhood home. But their real motive is doubtful. This is the general behavior of the parents of the disabled though a few exceptions exist.

Problems continue to haunt in the lives of the disabled. The lack of sight becomes a threat in their day-to-day activities viz: moving from one place to another, reading and writing, eating with spoon and fork, etc. Thus, visually impaired people suffer from both physical and emotional barriers. The protagonist Gabriel is not exempted from this fate. His inability to perform all these necessary day-to-day duties excludes him from the others in the society. Even taking bath becomes a big hurdle to Gabriel. He says, “There are many hazards in the bath for a blind man. What if I should stumble climbing into the tub and strike my head? What if I should slip beneath the water and drown? What if I should Drop the soap? I can hardly be expected to retrieve it myself” (52). These words of him clearly express his agony.

Another important aspect the novel tries to analyze is the kinds of visual impairment. There are two significant sets of visually impaired people. The first set consists of the born visually impaired And the second set of people become visually impaired as they grow either due to the accidents or due to severe diseases like brain fever. It is in a way true that the people belonging to the second category undergo many challenges when compared to the former. Similarly, the protagonist who belongs to the second set endures and surmounts all the difficulties he faces.

Loneliness becomes the sole company to Gabriel after he became blind. To the people who are born and brought up with a lot of company around, life in isolation becomes a big threat. In the same way, Gabriel has been surrounded by his friends and family before becoming blind and it is true that his blindness has separated him from his friends and family circles. He says to Samantha, “Bordom was the worst of my enemies until you arrived at Fair Child Park” (109). The above quotation explains his miserable life in seclusion.

The novel also brings out the emotional imbalances of the protagonist Gabriel. Gabriel undergoes significant changes in his behavior due to the sudden blindness. It could be stated that the hurdles in the day-to-day physical activities might be the cause for his emotional imbalance. For instance, there is a general belief that reading renders pleasure to the readers. Similarly, moving from one place to another, enjoying the company of friends and admiring the eternal beauty of

nature provide joy to people. The absence of these activities and the resultant sadness could have made him an emotional wreck. When Samantha offered to help him adjust to his blindness, Gabriel says, "I have no intention of living the rest of my life this way" (62). His frustration with life is clearly shown in the above quotation.

In the novel, *Yours Until Dawn*, Teresa Medeiros portrays Gabriel as a sturdy character in spite of his disability. While narrating the story, Medeiros says, "Brushing past the footman who scrambled forward to offer his arm. Although she supposed it shouldn't surprise her that he would choose to blunder his way through the dark rather than accepting a helping hand" (33). Moreover, at the beginning of the novel itself, the readers are told that Gabriel has dispelled two nurses who came forward to help him. The reason behind this attitude of Gabriel can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, he might have rejected to maintain his status and strength. Secondly, he would have thought that the people who came forward to help him may not be available always. This fear might have prevented him from accepting the helping hands.

Samantha enters into the life of Gabriel as a nurse. Though Gabriel tries to throw her out, she remains firm in her decision of assisting him in his life. Samantha says, "There are a hundred other things I can do to help you adjust to your blindness" (62). This is, of course, the ultimate aim of Samantha. She wants to make Gabriel physically and emotionally fit so that he could lead his life successfully in spite of his blindness.

The nurse, Samantha, is portrayed as a strong source of support to Gabriel. The following dialogue between Gabriel and Samantha shows how Gabriel misses his friends in London and how Samantha consoles him with her optimistic words. The dialogue goes like this:

Samantha: "There must be someone who would love to hear from you. Your fellow officers? Your family? Your friends back in London?"

Gabriel: "Why to spoil their fond memories of me?" He asked dryly. "I'm sure they'd much rather think of me as dead,"

Samantha: "Don't be ridiculous," she chided. "I'm sure they'd all be heartened by a brief note letting them know how you're getting along (110)

The above dialogue reveals Gabriel's pain of being away from his friends.

Medeiros in her writing renders a real picture of the sufferings of the visually impaired. Though they strive to lead an independent life, the necessity of physical and emotional support becomes a prerequisite. This is being offered by Samantha and Gabriel is blessed together physical and emotional support.

It is indeed true that Samantha acts as a key force in the movement of the novel. Herself being a nurse, Medeiros portrays the character of Samantha with intense care. She does many activities like clearing the things which block his way, reading to him in the afternoons, teaching him to eat with spoon and fork and also to use a cane to navigate through the rooms. In addition to these, she provides Gabriel with a dog which could assist him in her absence. She strongly believes that these alterations could bring many positive changes in Gabriel's life. Samantha says, "If you'd only allow me, I could help alleviate some of your medium. I could take you for long walks in the gardens. I could read aloud to you every afternoon. Why I could even help you with your correspondence if you like!" (110). At last, Samantha succeeds in bringing Gabriel back to his normal life and the novel ends with Gabriel's regaining his lost sight and his reunion with Cecily, who disguises herself as the nurse, Samantha.

There is a general belief or prejudice that the disabled are always at the receiving end. Contradictory to this general opinion, the writer brings in one of the incidents in which Gabriel saves the nurse, Samantha from the fire accident that breaks out at the stable. This shows that even a visually challenged person can save the others lives with the assistance of his other senses.

Teresa Medeiros portrays the real challenges faced by the visually impaired. The novel is written in the third person. She also encourages her readers to help such people like Samantha, the nurse. Apart from the chief theme of disability, the novel also deals with young adult love.

CONCLUSIONS

Disability touches everyone in the society in one way or the other. People with disabilities should have a strong mind and body so as to combat and overcome the challenges that arise due to their disabilities. They should remember that challenges make them more responsible and that life without struggle is a life without success. The so-called non-disabled should render their helping hands to the disabled whenever they can because kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see. Thus, they can make their love fruitful in service and help in the promotion of human values.

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