

Psychosoma of Disabilities as Reflected in Professor Prem Singh's Short Stories

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Introduction

Disability is perennial international phenomenon which has been existing on the continuum of the world literature, education and society for over ages be it since the days of Homer and Tiresias in Greece, Milton, Pope and Byron in England, Louis Braille in France or Ashtavakra, Dirghatamas, Soordas, saint Virjanand and saint Gangeshwaranand in India.

History and perspectives reveal that right since the days of antiquity to the postmodern and contemporary times of fourth world literature and society, disability community has been combating the odds for sustenance and self-esteem.

The physically challenged community, having passed through such ages as annihilation or rejection, emancipation or liberation, education and integration, has now emphatically entered the age of altercation and advocacy for the philosophy and politics of inclusivism due to magnanimities extended by certain compassionate social elements, liberal thinkers, educationists, and philosophers, and indeed, miraculous advent of information and communication technologies and divergent enabling social networking.

Nevertheless, the millstone of being identified with disabilities rather than with his/her abilities keeps grinding since infancy the person is born with or acquires impairment in human society of race, caste, cult, creed, rituals, gods, demons, prophets, sages, saints, snakes, such diseases as malaria, cholera, influenza, small pox, chicken pox, ignorance, untouchability and poverty which run hand-in-hand with causing disabilities.

Once stamped on the consciousness, The tag-card of disabilities keeps dangling greatly impacting the individual's psyche and he/she is constrained to carry its deadweight on his/her psychosoma.

Disability has found fullest expression in the Hindi poetry and short stories of Professor Dr. Prem Singh in India and I have made my endeavours to translate Singh's three stories into English.

Before proceeding to have a glance at English translations of three very short stories presented in this paper reflecting psycho-somatic experience of persons with disabilities and their compromise with life, it seems very much desirable to share the questions that one goes on aching with: Why do the people with disabilities suffer less from the physical deficit and more from the social kinks and vagaries? Why is there the dual game of pity, charity and yet denial of rights? Why are disabilities considered as anathema of gods, demons, saints and prophets even today in the world of virtual reality, the age of information and communication technology of cyber media? Is it because disability is not collectivity? Is it because disability doesn't constitute vote bank? When will the human mindset change in the society?

It is with the desire to probe and explore into such issues that I try to write and translate disability literature. One important intent is to invite, and raise the consciousness of academic activism to the fact that these people have suffered more because of social kinks and vagaries than on the ground of their physical disabilities, handicaps and impairments; and hence, the responsibility vests with academic activism and social epistemologists to give it full vent and expressions in literature and philosophy.

I translate to create awareness that these people too have the same human desires, aspirations, passion, emotions and vocational and bio-socio-psycho needs as do have all other normal human beings. My argument is that if there can be *dalit* literature, if there can be feminist literature, if there can be Fourth World Literature, comparative literature and if there can be even coca literature, why can't there be disability literature?

Don't the disabled people have life? Yes, they do have. Then, indeed, some literature must reflect that life, perpetually full of combat and compromise. The necessity is to write, translate, encourage and conduct research in disability literature so as to raise consciousness and change the set social conventions, attitudes, and mindset and thus remove the kinks at the hands of which persons with disabilities have been the worst victims.

English translation of Prof. Dr. Prem Singh's three stories from Hindi into English with due courtesy by Dr. Mahabir Prasad Yadav:

"The Mad Girl"

The big glittering eyes, crooked nose, the smiling face, the white and pink fair complexion, tender lips like blooming buds of blossoms, the fingers like the long, thin branches of the trees, five feet and three inch height, pretty body, disturbed garbs, open scattered hairs, sometimes fast and sometimes slowly quivering head, sometimes hoarse and sometimes very delicate and sweet tongue, sometimes curses and hurls, abuses and sometimes mutters in odd words and expressions of romance!

Yes, she is extremely cute and dainty. But also blind, and mad too.

She is no lesser than the fairy in her looks. She looks like the bud of Kashmere.

She is a cursed girl born in Pehal Gaon of a middle class Kashmere family, whose mother died immediately after her birth.

It took no time to know that she was blind, Yes, she wasn't mad.

But her father got her transformed into a mad girl.

He used to take her to some sorcerer or shaman for the treatment and restoration of her eyesight.

The shaman would heavily hit hard on her head and then tether the head with catena.

He would give her some strange syrup to drink.

The treatment continued for some time.

Her eyesight couldn't be restituted but, she gained mental deficiency and cerebral damage because of constantly hitting very hard on her head.

Then her father was occupied with the upbringing of his other children.

He abandoned this blind and intellectually deficient girl in the asylum of the visually impaired children.

He so forsook her that he never bothered to visit her again.

One day, an awful incident occurred with her.

A rich and renowned merchandiser had come along with his family to donate food to the blind children of the asylum.

All the children were sitting in a queue and taking their meals.

This mentally deficient blind girl was somehow left alone on the roof of the building.

A youth of the donor family saw her alone on the roof, and seizing the opportunity went upstairs and raped her.

She cried, moaned and groaned but wasn't heard as nobody was there. The time slid and with the passage of time she became pregnant.

For the fear of facing a disgraceful situation, the assistant of the matron took her with herself and got the abortion performed.

The pregnancy was terminated; but, since then, she has sometimes been muttering in the odd words of romance and sometimes cursing and hurling abuses.

She has nobody to call her own. . . . Even abuses and romance are not hers.

Oppressed and exploited by the society constantly, this mad girl is not able to question anyone now.

Is there anyone who would protect, support and safeguard her.

No one, no one, no one!

"Tapers and the Balls"

I can't see even my own face in the light of the tapers I make myself.

What an irony it is! But what can be done?

And I even can't kick the ball I make myself. Isn't it an irony?

We both are talking of the things about which both of us can't do anything.

But, is it less that we don't depend on anybody? Our children are good and healthy, they are smart enough, they can see the light.

Our children are doing what we cannot do. What else is needed for the parents, Rajan?

It's good Bhavna, that the carriage which doesn't have air in one of its wheels, and even its driver can't see, and yet it's moving.

But how?

Only you and I know it.

It's nothing less that we are running it.

The Tapers I make are of various colours; but I have never been able

to see any colour.

I haven't seen yours or even my own face.

Don't I feel sorry.

When the children are singing and playing upstairs, when there is a party and I am not able to climb the stairs in the absence of the ramp and when I am not able to meet anybody.

I don't like to be taken upstairs being lifted up along with my wheelchair.

You can do all the necessary shopping in the market without your eyesight and I can't manage to do it despite having full eyesight.

Well, the children will manage to do it all by themselves but I don't want them to be bound to us.

They serve and fulfill our needs. . . . They aren't our servants.

Doing domestic work is not becoming servant.

We have to educate them so that they don't grudge that their parents haven't done anything for them.

I have many times heard Tinkoo saying, My father is blind and my mother is lame and I have noticed Kajal covering his mouth with her hand saying, I shouldn't be that way. So, what does it happen?

Our parents are doing everything for us. We are studying in a very good school. Our parents also teach us at home.

The parents of other children can't even educate them. I'll get the ramp built up for mom, when I grow up. And I would give one of my eyes to my father.

Rajan and Bhavna were listening all this, and the showers of tears gushed forth on the faces of both of them.

"The Musical Drum"

Today I feel blessed mother.

It's not my hands that have played on the drum today.

My mind and soul have played it today.

It's not only my throat that has sung a song today.

It has echoed through my soul as well.

Life has become successful by seeking your refuge, mother!

Who says, I don't have my mother?

Who says, I don't have my father?

You are everything, Mother! Kindly let me be in your refuge only.

Now, nowhere will I ever go play the drum anywhere.

My grandmother bade me farewell from the hospital itself as soon as I was born and told my mother when she regained her consciousness that the baby was born dead.

He couldn't be kept for long.

You regained consciousness late and therefore the baby couldn't be shown to you.

Otherwise, what's the use of seeing the face of a dead baby?

A living and waking healthy child will be playing in your lap in the next year.

Shama Aunty took me away. She wept as well as laughed while she took me away.

Gradually, I began to grow up, but wasn't sent to school.

The singing and dancing, beating the drum, wearing the dancing bells, chatting and joking, kissing and licking, it was all done.

Sometimes, I was adorned this way, sometimes that way.

Sometimes I was dressed as girls, sometimes as boys.

Wandering from home to home began slowly, sometimes on the wedding occasion, sometimes when the baby was born. Sometimes there was fighting over money, sometimes over sarees, and jewellery.

The whole group while chased away threatened to be nude.

Not even this, sometimes we fought over good food, clothing and money as well.

Fighting was done, and hugging as well; we lived in a group only; and none other would interrupt, and even none of the relatives came to visit us.

Celebration was duly organized whenever a baby was born like me and Shama Aunty also wept by going aside.

We addressed others only as aunts and uncles.

Shama Aunty called someone as Sita, Radhae, Kullan or Shyam or whatever name came to her mind.

Many times I thought of what to call myself.

No physical deficit can stop anyone from reading and writing.

Then, why aren't we sent to school?

Why aren't we taught to read and write as is done with all other normal children?

If they can study who can't see, if they can read who can't walk, even they can learn, read and write who even neither can speak nor hear; and even they aren't discarded out of their homes, and even if they are sent to residential schools, and not taken back home, the parents are counseled and upbraided for throwing them out.

Why are we thrown or forced to abandon our homes?

No job is assigned to us anywhere.

Even we aren't allowed to beat drums in the temples or Gurudwaras.

A drum is just a drum.

All may recall and recite the name of God.

Today, I have been able to beat and play on the drum there with the special permission of the priest of the mother's temple.

My life is blessed.

The wires of my life have vibrated.

Now, I'll inspire the people of my class in society to study.

I'll get the schools opened where all can study together.

Today, I have the universal Mother face to face.

Now, I won't recall the mother who bore and threw me away.

Mother! Have mercy on me, have your Divine kindness and Grace on me, impart me strength and courage so that I am able to do some such job, that the people of our class are also able to lead the normal life like all the others so as to enable them to get educated, become employable and are employed to do some jobs, so that we are not seen differently and chased away with humiliations.

Instruct me, compassionate mother.

Illuminate the path of my darkness, o divine mother.

Kindly enable us to get rid of our nakedness, Mother!

Give us all the rights to conduct our lives fully well with honour and dignity, Mother.

I fully trust that my prayers and calls would be addressed.

There is only delay, but, no darkness in the kingdom of God.

It will continue to beat the mental drum and something good will certainly emerge out of it someday.

I bend myself in reverence to you, Mother! And to you also mother through whom I came in this world and society to see injustice and inhumanity, to seek the refuge of the universal Mother to impart me adequate strength and courage to combat with social injustice.

A time would certainly approach when the darkness of the night would end and the fresh dawn would rise and bloom.

With this expectation, I dedicate the remaining part of my life for opening and starting a school where the people of my class can freely learn to read and write, study and get well-educated, where they can learn to conduct life with honour and dignity!

Deenanath! (Impotent! I'll be reborn in quest of potency.)