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Disability Versus Ableism in J.K. Rowing's *Harry Potter Series*

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Abstract

The world of fantasy as represented in fiction is always a source of joy and learning, especially for the young readers. Fantasy Literature also serves the purpose of educating the readers and the society on the upcoming issues such as inter-sectionality discussed in Disability Studies. The present paper explores the delineation of the disability and Ableism in Rowling's Harry Potter Series. The similarities between the fictional magical society in Harry Potter Series and the present world with its established hierarchies and ideologies may bring awareness among the readers about the conflicts that they create in the social construct. In the real world, discriminations such as racism, sexism, gender bias and Disability exist and they are ingrained in the culture. The ableist culture tries to picture disability as an undesirable matter. The story of the Muggles and Squibs in the fictional world of Harry Potter Series is sure to transform the perspective of the readers.

Keywords: Disability, Ableism, Hierarchies, Ideologies etc.,

Disability Studies is a newly emerging trend in the field of literary criticism. Literary texts are viewed and discussed from the point of view of race, gender, sexuality, age, class etc. But the potential discrimination that has been occurring between the Disabled and the Ableism goes unnoticed. The aim of this paper is to ignite discussions about disability and ableism as reflected in Harry Potter Series.

Rowling's Harry Potter Series is set in a magical fictional world. Yet, it resembles the nations and the history of the real world. The hierarchies and the traditions presented in the novels are similar to those of today. Discrimination and the dilemma that arises out of it are commonly seen in the novels. The theme of discrimination gives lead to a discussion on 'othering', to say in other words, the discrimination shown between the 'disabled' and the 'ableism'.

This paper is an attempt to examine the categorisation on non-magical people as disabled within the magical society. In 'The Half-Blood Prince', Albus Dumbledore asserts that Hogwarts serves as an institution for younger individuals possessing exceptional abilities. Severus Snape in The Deathly Hallows opines that it is real for them and not for others. These statements denote the difference that exists in the magical world, delineated by Rowling.. There are many

processes of ‘othering’ working out in the fiction. The ideologies of ableism force the non-magical society to appear as disabled. These ideologies are implicit and make a social construct, the result of which affects the beings.

In Harry Potter Series, the discrimination is maintained between people endowed with magical ability and people who lack magical ability. There are no two races, so to say, the magical race and the non-magical race. Discrimination and prejudice is shown purely on the basis of magical ability. The first evidence of discrimination lies in the entire constitutional set-up in the fiction. The magical population calls the people born without magical powers as Muggles. The witches and wizards live in hiding places, away from the sight of others. The Squibs are those born in magical lineage but lack the magical powers. They live away from the sight of the Muggles, as per the international magical law. The Ministry of Magic is an important administrative part of the government set-up. The mission of this ministry is to protect and seclude the magical power from the non-magical people.

The second evidence of discrimination between the Disabled and the Ableism is explicit when the fiction focuses the individuals from the mixed race. In The Philosopher’s Stone, Hermione Granger is an English Muggle-born. She retains magical ability though she is born to non-magical parents. Even then, the magical society intends to exclude her and deny her the right to carry magical instruments and pursue magical education. Draco Malfoy introduces Harry Potter to the magical society. Harry faces the discriminating ideologies and he is ready to deny the friendship of Malfoy.

In Harry Potter Series, the social construct defines the lack of magical powers as Disability and the inborn magical powers as Ableism. The reader could witness occasions where oppression is expressed in the magical culture. In The Goblet of Fire, Hermione begins hotly saying to Ron that people like him only who like up rotten and unjust systems.

The wizarding world and particularly the Ministry of Magic has a strong belief that magical culture is the unbeatable supreme power. If non-magical group of people gets the chance to acquire the skill in magic, it will covet the ability to perform it. Laws are significant in protecting the magical people from the non-magical savagery. They are the means to prevent the non-magical people from comprehending and gaining knowledge of the basics of magic. The Ministry of Magic monitors and regulates the relationship between the magical and the non-magical societies. The Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry offers a special course on the non-magical culture because most of the magical people are ignorant of the culture and technology of the non-magical groups. They are not aware of the inconveniences faced by the non-magical people simply by the absence of magical ability.

Ableism in the Magical Culture

In the wizarding world of Harry Potter, magic is considered an unavoidable quality for a meaningful life. As per Ableism, using non-magical methods denotes the removal of autonomy of the magical people. It is a mark of immaturity. At Hogwarts School, the students are punished by removing the magical power in them. This makes them crippled and disabled. Loss of the ability to perform magic is the worst punishment that one could get. This is the common attitude of the magical people as well as the institutionalized justice system. In Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, Ron looks thunderstruck on knowing that his inmates could not use magic power anymore as they have lost it. He says sarcastically that by losing the magical power, they have to act like Muggles.

Removal of physical autonomy in a normal human society is, of course, a punishment; yet, it will not be an impediment in making communication with the world around. But in a magical world as in Harry Potter Series, removal of magical power will cause serious hindrance. The Ministry

of Magic in not interested in the Squibs. In the register maintained by the Ministry, even the witches and the wizards get registered, wherein neither the Squibs nor the Muggles do not appear in this registry. The Ministry of Magic considers these categories as non-performers in the magical society. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Petunia Evans convinces her sister Lily Evans saying that it is good that she is separated from normal people. This separation is for their safety.

The Dursleys are the only people who are unaware of the aspects of magical culture. In the midst of the magical world, their ignorance is portrayed as a self-inflicted condition. They reject the invasion of magic in their lives, either in the form of a magical wonder or just knowledge of how the magical society functions. The Dursleys feel helpless when confronted with the reality of magic.

The present paper has discussed a new perspective on the physical and mental disability as delineated in Harry Potter Series. The normates consider such disabilities to be something undesirable. Accepting and including only the able-bodied subject in the society is a myth. If this realization occurs, the structures and attitudes that create disability can be dismantled and inclusiveness can be created for a harmonious human life.

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