



EXAMINING THE REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY: ANALYZING THE CHARACTER OF TYRION LANNISTER AS A DWARF IN GEORGE R. R. MARTIN'S A GAME OF THRONES

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Abstract

Disability studies is a prominent area in literature. The main objective of this study is to contribute to the field of disability studies. Disability models have been studied in relation to George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*. Tyrion Lannister, a dwarf has been taken for the study. The moral model and social model are the primary models used in the research. The goal of this research would be to add to the field of disability studies by better understanding how disability is depicted in literature and the impact of different theories of disability on the portrayal of a disabled character. It will serve to illuminate the social and cultural components of disability depiction, as well as challenge preconceptions and encourage more inclusive narratives.

Keywords: Disability Model, Social Model, Moral Model, Tyrion Lannister.

Introduction

Disability literature is an emerging field in the humanities. According to Disability Discrimination Act Section 1 (2) "A person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on her or his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities" (4). It is an interdisciplinary field. It is laid on the foundation of humanities, anthropology, social sciences and medicine. Disability studies have gained momentum in first-world countries. In the third-world countries, it is still in its

preliminary stage. Disability rights activists advocate for the rights of the disabled. There are emerging theories around Disability studies.

Disability studies can be judged based on three factors; The moral model, the social model and the medical model. The moral model is also called as personal tragedy model. It views Disability as a sin. This takes place in certain cultures, subsequently challenging the cultural construction. The Disabled are kept away from their family for certain religious and superstitious beliefs. In ancient Israel adhering to the

moral model, an incident is cited from The Hebrew Bible;

“No man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is a hunchback or a dwarf, or who has any eye defect, or who has to fester or running sores or damaged testicles. No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the food offerings to the Lord. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God.” (Leviticus 21:18)

Also, In the work *A Game of Thrones* Tyrion Lannister the dwarf is held responsible for the death of his mother. “Do tell my Lord Father. My mother died birthing me, and he’s never been sure” (54). This accentuates the Moral Model of Disability.

The social model identifies the personal barriers of the disabled. It acknowledges the oppression that comes from the abled. The phrase ‘Social Model of disability’ was coined by a disabled academic, Mike Oliver in the book *The Politics of Disablement*. It undertakes the voices and opinions of the disabled. It also emphasises the need for social inclusion. In The Social model education, family, leisure, environment and activities are taken into observation. It strives to assert the traits which aid the disabled.

Dwarfism is a genetic disorder. Dwarfism was not cogitated as a disease in ancient days. In Ancient Egypt, dwarfs were seen as the God. Women who were pregnant prayed to the dwarfs for their safe delivery. In *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt* by Kozma we find the prayer, “Oh, good dwarf come on behalf of the one who sent You, may the placenta lower” (311). Aristotle was the foremost academic to define dwarfism. According to Aristotle in his *Treatises on Natural Sciences and Physiology*, People who have dwarfism develop a large upper body part. He also claimed that their large torso developed major metabolic complications. According to Hippocrates, fetal development is interconnected with dwarfism. These did not have any

supporting medical evidence, according to the critic Dasen.

Dwarves are distended as hardworking mine workers and metal workers in conventional forms of storytelling. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, dwarfs were revealed as active helpers of Snow White. Tolkien has impelled his dwarves to be the soul of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. C.S Lewis has given a prominent character sketch to his dwarf Trumpkin, in his novel series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Daniel Quilp, the dwarf is one of the cardinal antagonists in the novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* by Charles Dickens. He is portrayed as a vicious villain.

George R.R. Martin has always been compared with the British fantasy writer, J. R.R. Tolkien. Martin is called the American Tolkien. This study reconnoitres Martin’s dwarf Tyrion Lannister and his empowering journey. Martin’s Dwarf was a success story because of his wit, strategies and the emotional agility he carries for another human. This is highlighted with reference to the text. Martin has set his writing realistic respite delving into the psyche of a disabled person. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchel in *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education* augur about the social reception of the Disabled, “Historically, disabled people have been the objects of study, but not the purveyors of the knowledge base of disability” (4). Martin dismantles this by bringing Tyrion into focus. Martin projects Tyrion as a strong man with academic ableism opposing the stand of the critics.

Martin highlights Tyrion Lannister as a successful fictional character. The character received a huge reception from people across the globe whereby acquiring validation from the reader circle and the viewership circle. “Was there ever a wittier, more sarcastic, more interesting character in the realm of fantasy literature? If there is, I sure haven’t discovered it yet. Tyrion carries a lot of the story as the saga unfolds” (Verhoeve 69). Quotes of the character

became labelled in coffee cups, t-shirts and stationaries after receiving huge acclaim. A book titled *The Wit and Wisdom* of Tyrion Lannister was published by the Bantam publishers.

Martin inducts a disabled human with all the abled characteristics. Tanya Titchkosky in *Academic Ableism* lambasts, "disabled people are socially organized under the rubric of knowl- edge bases" (15) . In the Novel, Martin has tried to proclaim academic ableism by bridging Tyrion and his interest over books He has portrayed Tyrion as a well-read person from royal lineage. "See that You return the book to the shelves. Be gentle with the Valyrian scrolls, the parchment is very dry. Ayrmidon's Engine of war is quite rare and yours is the only copy I've ever seen" (82).

Martin lugs Tyrion Lannister as the son of Lord Tywin Lannister. The social model is discussed in relation to his family. Lord Tywin Lannister is perceived as a man of power. He is the Lord of Casterly rock and the Warden of the West. The Lannisters were the financial distributors of the realm. Tyrion is the sibling of the twins Jamie Lannister and Cersei Lannister. His family members are the Lannisters who hold important positions in the realm. Lord Mormont , longstanding Lord of the Starks registers this to Tyrion by saying, "Your sister sits beside the king. Your brother is a great knight and your father the most powerful lord in the seven kingdoms" (200). Tyrion is illustrated to be hated by his own family members. Lord Tywin and Cersei despise Tyrion. "His sister peered at him with the same expression of faint distaste she had worn since the day he was born" (85). Here the neglected social support is seen. Their self-worth is neglected by the poor treatment of the support system. And the attitude which occupies a predominant role in the social model is incorporated here.

Lack of Understanding by Tyrion's family members has a role to play in accordance with the social model. In Social model the

social exclusion by intentional or inadvertent means are said to be the focal point in the maltreatment of the disabled. Tyrion yearns for the acceptance from his family members. " Do tell my Lord Father. My mother died birthing me, and he's never been sure " (54). His biological family saw him as the one who is responsible for his mother's death . Even though everyone appears to be standing against Tyrion his brother Jamie Lannister displays love and protection for his brother. " During all the terrible long years of his childhood only Jamie had ever shown him the smallest measure of affection or respect, and for that Tyrion was willing to forgive him most anything " (85). Jamie Lannister depicts the acceptance and sociological inclusion which plays an essential role in the ' Social Model of Disability'. Jamie gifted a horse for Tyrion's twenty-third birthday, which is beloved to Tyrion. In this context, Tyrion is exhibited to be happy about the concurrence from his brother, which did matter a lot to him. Tyrion did not feel secure enough in his own skin. He facilitated his emotions by using auto-derogatory terms in *A Game of Thrones*, " All dwarfs are bastards in their father's eyes" (54). Rhetoricians initiate the usage of words and their correlation with people and their lives. In disability, this does occupy an important role. Tyrion's defence mechanism is auto derogation equipping them to reveal his insecure self. In this context his insecurity is visible. It suggests his yearning for a secure home right from his childhood whenever he saw his siblings, the twins lead him to face so many questions in *A Game of Thrones*, "Tyrion wondered what it would be like to have a twin, and decided that he would rather not know. Bad enough to face himself in a looking glass every day. Another he was thought too dreadful to contemplate" (85).

" It would be nice to see more dwarfs like one in the Eastenders instead of always being the fool" (Amanda,20). They were either funny or scary... People expect You to be up laughing and joking all the time"

(Jade, 13). Martin challenges these socially constructed notions by constructing a character like Tyrion.

Tyrion is imbued with both humour and wit. His conversation with the paraplegic boy Bran Stark proves it

On your way. I have a gift for you, the dwarf said to Bran. "Do you like to ride, boy?" Maester Luwin came forward. "My lord, the child has lost the use of his legs. He cannot sit a horse." "Nonsense," said Lannister. "With the right horse and the right saddle, even a cripple can ride." The word was a knife through Bran's heart. He felt tears come unbidden to his eyes. "I'm not a cripple!" Then I am not a dwarf," the dwarf said with a twist of his mouth. (236)

The wit of Tyrion and his intentions for the boy is clear by his choice of words. He wants to lay the picture that the boy is a cripple and he requires acceptance. Here he uses auto derogation to highlight his point. Simultaneously, he gifts the saddle and embeds it to the boy even after that paraplegic phase of the boy, he can still ride. He reinstates that disability will not be an end to the boy's life.

Although his wit was not received well by everyone. The dim-witted soldiers and knights were few among the ones who disliked Tyrion. Ser Allister was a long-standing Knight of the Starks. Tyrion was visiting the Starks, along with the King, Robert Baratheon. Ser Allister mentioned Tyrion as half a man due to his dwarfism. As his name sounded Ser Allister Thorne and his words were hurtful. This points out the sickness surrounding the mind of the abled Ser Allister Thorne. And later Lord Mormont joined Ser Allister. He said Tyrion was a wicked man to have provoked someone like Ser Allister. Pespicious behavior is seen through his work and social environment. The social model insists social support which stays opposing to the life events of Tyrion.

Tyrion and his prerequisite in diplomacy and strategizing were important for the Starks. Mormont later mentions the need for the Lannisters in the realm. Their enemy may be appearing soon. So, he insists Tyrion to have a word with his brother and his father. He also insists to have a conversation with his brother in law, the king Robert Baratheon. In *Disability Studies* by Marion Quirici, she mentions that only those who pass as the good disabled are taken into Job Position. Martin has made Tyrion the good disabled, making him an abled choice for the job. Martin also places Tyrion with a moral character, enabling him to be the good disabled.

Apparently in Moral model of disability, an individual's character is procured for the study. Martin portrays Tyrion as a man of humility. Martin indexes Tyrion to extend his support towards the misfits. Tyrion associates with the misfits in a tailored social structure. This does make him feel that he belonged among them. He offers kindness towards Jon when he was upset about his half-brother Bran who became paraplegic. "Still, I know what it is to love a brother, Lord Snow. I will give Bran whatever small help is, in my power." "Thank you, my lord, of Lannister" (207). He pulled off his glove and offered his bare hand. "Friend." Tyrion found himself oddly touched. "Most of my kin are bastards," he said with a wry smile, "but you're the first I've had to friend" (207). Tyrion makes Jon feel inclusive around him. This makes a lot of difference. Men of royal blood would not share their acquaintance with "bastards", Tyrion stands out as a person against all the discrimination enforced by society. He is receptive to Jon Snow's happiness in seeing Tyrion as his friend. This affection for Snow had an impact on Tyrion. When Snow's uncle Benjen went missing, Snow felt it was his need to go and find his uncle. "If he doesn't come back," Jon Snow promised, "Ghost and I will go find him." He put his hand on the dire wolf's head. "I believe you," Tyrion said, but what he thought was, And who will go find you? He

shivered. ” (208) This spectacles the concern he had for Snow. This did bother him after finding a reliable friend like Snow. This records Tyrion's care and affection for his friend Jon Snow. Throughout the story, Martin draws Tyrion as a congenial person constructing the moral stand of Tyrion. Martin cites this through Tyrion's nephew Joffrey. During Tyrion's stay at Winterfell, he happened to experience the howling of wolves during nighttime. It agitates the Lannisters. It also affects Tyrion while he was reading books. But he chooses to adapt to the surrounding. His environmental cognizance is visible here. Joffrey was willing to kill the wolves.

Clegane suggests killing the wolf even though the wolf is seen as the sigil of the Starks. Clegane is a loyal knight to the Lannisters. Clegane endeavours the future king, which was impossible for Tyrion. Subsequently, Joffrey orders his men by saying, “ Send a dog to kill a dog!” (83). This implicates the unhealthy mind of Joffrey and Knight Clegane. Tyrion retaliates the situation with his wit “ I beg to differ nephew. The starks can count past six. Unlike some princes I might name” (83). This Substantiates the sarcasm of Tyrion. Tyrion mentors his nephew Joffrey to be courteous by enabling him to enquire about his health of Bran. But Joffrey opposes as he was not ready to hear the cries of the women.

“Tyrion Lannister reached up and slapped his nephew hard across the face. The boy's cheek began to redden.“One word,” Tyrion said, “and I will hit you again.” “I'm going to tell Mother!” Joffrey exclaimed. Tyrion hit him again. Now both cheeks flamed. “You tell your mother,” Tyrion told him. “But first you get yourself to Lord and Lady Stark, and you fall to your knees in front of them, and you tell them how very sorry you are, and that you are at their service if there is the slightest thing you can do for them or theirs in this desperate hour, and that all your prayers go with them. Do You Understand? (84)

Martin reiterates the kind heart and moral code of Tyrion. He reprieves when Joffrey's siblings, Myrcella Baratheon and Tommen Baratheon were affable towards the paraplegic condition of Bran, this. He reaffirms that Jamie and he are two different peas in a pod. Tyrion's temperament is reinstated by his contrast, Jamie Lannister. Martin reveals the incongruity between the two siblings. These two men support each other, but their disparate perception makes a lot of difference. Jamie's view of the boy Bran affects Tyrion. Jamie perceives it was not desirable for the boy to live. He shares his idea on mercy killing of the Boy. But Tyrion's view is contending, “ Death is so finally terrible but life is full of possibilities “ (87). And Jamie replied “ You are a perverse little imp aren't You? “(87). This exhibits the cold disposition of Jamie Lannister which juxtaposes with the optimism of Tyrion. A cripple can also do so many activities without his leg and Jamie's perspective is from a Knight's view but Tyrion's notion stays perspicacious.

For Noemi Martinez in Quirici's *Disability Studies*, “ Survival is coded differently to crip communities. Survival has different meanings to different communities” (103). Tyrion is kept alive since he is a potential captive, and it is his privilege that saves him. Martin sketches Tyrion and guards him through his family banner. Martin exposes the hypocrisy of the Starks, who are held in high esteem by Tyrion. Martin records this through the kidnap of Tyrion. Tyrion is kept as a captive by the Starks. His horse, which was gifted by his brother, Jamie for his twenty-third birthday gets killed by the kidnappers. And they eat the horse meat, offering a piece to Tyrion.. He gets into a rage witnessing the indifference of the starks. “ Here Martin evinces the moral susceptibility of Tyrion.

Martin reprimands the abled human being through Tyrion. Tyrion himself admits that he feels like a man with no father when he hears his friend Snow say that he is called a

bastard. "Would you rather be called the Imp? Let them see that their words can cut you and you'll never be free of the mockery. If they want to give you a name take it, make it your own. Then they can't hurt you with it anymore" (179). The empowering attitude of Tyrion exhibits his moral strength.

This paper tries to bring the ableness of Tyrion, a dwarf. It unfolds the treatment he faces from the abled people and their reception and behaviour towards Tyrion. This research also addresses disability with cognizance of social and moral behaviour. Tyrion's ableness is measured by using the parameter of his social model and moral model. It also disseminates his emotional agility in handling a situation with his wit and knowledge. Social inclusion and participation is addressed in relation to the disabled. It touches the problems faced by the disabled in relation to the abled. The abled and their behaviours are studied in relation to Tyrion. The need for inclusion of the disabled has been a notable aspect the paper has tried to initiate. The limitation of this study is, it has not taken the medical model. It is limited to the social model and Moral model.

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