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S. T. HINDU COLLEGE, NAGERCOIL-2, Tamilnadu, India



## Myth, Disability And Literature: Historical Implications And Modern Outlook

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### 1] Abstract:

Disability, whether it is physical or mental impairment, has many connotations. Traditionally it has negative implications; however modern outlook with disability is quite supportive, positive and constructive. Traditionally, particularly in literature, it is associated negative values such as ugliness, crookedness, malpractice, sadomasochism, guilt-ridden mind and many more distortions. Ancient myth and literature is archetype to modern literature and culture. We know that disability exist today and it traces back its roots in ancient period. Greek literary writers especially dramatists like Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus used images of organs of body sometimes distorted, crooked and deprived and sometimes with hideousness and dreadfulness. Historical implications about the disability can found in Sophoclean trilogy *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*.

This research paper designed to show historical implications and modern outlook towards disability with reference to the ancient Greek plays performed by Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus. The paper also designates the modern and supportive alternative value system regarding physical and mental impairment. It protests against the negative values, beliefs of ancient about disability.

**2] Key Words:** disability, visual impairment, anthropomorphic being, mental impairment etc.



### **3] Objectives of the Study:**

- 1] To understand the concept of disability
- 2] To interpret historical implications of disability represented in ancient Greek plays
- 3] To study modern outlook of ancient implications of the word disability

### **4] Introduction:**

The term disability or functional impairment is an impairment that may be cognitive, intellectual, physical mental or sensory or some combination of these. It is considered as depressing, down-beating and quite disappointing to the individual and society. Modern outlook has changed the perspective of disability. It changed the attitude towards looking disability. Modern disability study concentrates on discursive views and practices of disability. It is quite supportive, compassionate, caring and all-accommodating. Contemporary understanding of disability derive from concepts that arose during the West's scientific enlightenment. This enlightenment focuses on knowledge derived from reason and on the values of natural science to human progress.

### **5] Analysis:**

*Oedipus Rex* is a famous tragedy performed by the Greek playwright Sophocles which explores the crossroads and hazardous journey of Oedipus the King. The Greek word 'Oedipus' denotes wounded ankles which symbolically represents as disgust, uncured pain and exacerbate guilty feelings of the protagonist. Physical deformities were considered as part of mental illness. The distorted mind was associated with physical deformities. Later it has become literary method. Many dramatists Symbols are repeatedly appeared in a story and have a deeper meaning that what appears on the surface. One of the major symbols is Oedipus ankles. The title of the play itself connotes deeper. Physical deformity shows deeper uncured pain of a person. Guilt-ridden Oedipus feels very depressed about the incest he has done. This incessant pain is shown in the form of wounded ankle. Oedipus gets his name, as Corinthian messenger tell from the fact that Oedipus left in the mountains with his ankles pinned together. Jocasta mentions that Laius



abandoned Oedipus on a barren mountain after he was born. This injury leaves Oedipus with vivid scars for the rest of his life. Oedipus's injury represents the way in which destiny has marked and set him apart.

*Oedipus Rex* constitutes one more symbol of disability that is blindness. Sophocles explores blindness from two angles. First, the physical blindness which denotes an inability to see the truth Tiresias is physically blind and happens to be prophet. Tiresias' blindness is physical rather he has shown as visionary person having prophetic evidence. He represents a man who is closer to the truth that is naked truth. He says truth can be destructive. The knowledge about the fact, though it is of the past or future can sometimes become unbearable. His blindness has quite positive connotations towards physical disability. On the other hand, Oedipus is mentally blind who represents ignorance. He is totally ignorant about the truth about the fact he is unknown to this. So the mental disability such as ignorance, hubris (ego) has been shown more harmful, destructive than physical disability.

There is one more symbol of blindness which shows disability of Sophoclean character Tiresias is a blind prophet is trying to explain to Oedipus that Oedipus himself is actually in the man who killed King Laius. Oedipus refuses to believe Tiresias on the evidence right in front of him to confirm it instead he tries to blame the murder on everyone else. Oedipus is a blind to the truth. Oedipus is blind by mind Tiresias is blind physically virus is search the truth he is a blind person but Oedipus is physically not blind but mentally he is blind this blindness represents ignorance about the truth autofact.

The portrayal of blindness in Albert Camus' *The Outsider* has been deeply associated with the primitive motif represented in Sophoclean *Oedipus Rex*. The protagonist in the novel is blinded to a personal truth and are physically blinded as well. In the *Outsider*, Meursault's blindness is metaphorical, as he is negligent to his own absurdity, which he later becomes categorized as. On the other hand, Oedipus's blindness is literal, as he is ignorant to the truth of his life. In the play *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles employs the image of blindness of Tiresias, Jocasta and Oedipus to point out how understanding is far greater than vision alone.



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Sphinx is anthropomorphic being in Sophoclean *Oedipus Rex*. It is female monster with the body of lion. The head and breast of woman, eagles wings and serpents tale. She was sent by the Gods to plague the town of Thebes as a punishment of some ancient crime. The riddle of the Sphinx is the image of life itself through time- childhood, maturity, age and death. When the person faces the riddle of Sphinx, death has no further hold on you, then the curse of the Sphinx disappears. This kind symbol represents female deformities. The cursed woman is quite shown in the form of her physical deformity. The conquest of the fear of death is the recovery of life's joy.

Both Greek tragedies and comedies have provided the memorable characters afflicted with disability. They were shown in the form of blind, lame and temporarily insane. Deafness rarely features. The playwrights such as Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus. The depiction of the disabled characters in drama and the evidence that drama provides for the treatment of the disabled.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* which explores negative way of disability which is devaluation of disability. The character *Philoctetes* expresses the deformed social construction of disability as well as the abnormal ability of those who live with chronic impairments. The Philoctates meditates on the status of disabled who are unfairly isolated from human community and who are often unfairly seen in an instrumental fashion that fails to recognize their fundamental status of the disabled who are unfairly alienated from the community. They are unfairly seen as failures and not capable, valuable essential for the success of human endeavors and society. Philoctetes demonstrates the ability in disability and shines brightly on the essential contributions that people with disabilities makes in our societies. Philoctetes represents the lives of people who live daily with chronic impairments need not be seen as necessarily tragic. Instead these modes of being speak to human diversity, ingenuity and triumph.

Euripides's *The Trojan Women* constitutes women bodies as imprisoned and wounded by war, using diverse settings, props and broken doll's bodies. In this play, Coral admits her body is crisscrossed with scars. Caroline Bird's *Trojan Women: After Euripides* (2012) and Kaite



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O'Reille's *Peeling* (2002) uses distorted wounded images of women and disabled actresses trapped in their multilayered costumes and confined to an unlit backstage in *Peeling*. The above mentioned playwrights show the women as distorted, powerless mothers who are expected to take responsibility of vulnerable children. Euripides attempts to show the woman who is disabled in patriarchal society. Kaite O'Reille's *Peeling* shows tragic women lamenting on their lost city and dead men. There are three actresses Beaty, Coral and Alfa who are called as disabled characters. They are immobile who are stuck at the back and unlit on the stage not because of their disabilities but because of their multilayered prosperous frocks. Alpha is deaf and uses sign language and during the show stage directions and intermittent sign understanding supports her ability to communicate with other characters and the audience. Beaty is described as four feet tall woman and Coral is confined to electric wheelchair. With their disabilities, their big hoop skirts and their skeptical and humorous dialogues create both a comical and tragic mood. As in Beckett, the characters are tragic, comic, ridiculous and mocking. The visual contrast of these disabled women clothed in offensively oversized dresses which creates piteous images rather than comical. However their situation in which the characters cannot leave their restricted space and keep waiting between scenes wearing huge costumes they cannot handle, is similar to Beckett's portrayal of inertia.

### Conclusion:

Disability is often associated with sin, offense, indulgence, crime, transgression, stigma, and kind of untouchability. Disabled woman's body has been shown with terror. It is also associated with wrongdoing, bad behavior, unlawful activity, misconduct. The images and symbols used in the traditional and modern literature are offensive, unpleasant, distasteful and disgusting. This kind of image-making makes the degradation of most of the physically and mentally impaired men and women. Modern disability study changed this perspective of looking them with constructive attitude. They emphasized on the inclusion of physical impaired in the human society. Historically male dominated society created women images in distortion. Male dominated society defines these disabled women as imperfect and malfunctioning.

### 6] References:



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