

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165

The Criterion

THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

15 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 15 ISSUE-6 DECEMBER 2024

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Projecting Abled Disability and Creation of New World in the Novel *The Island of Lost Girls*

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14605467>

Article History: Submitted-12/11/2024, Revised-17/12/2024, Accepted-18/12/2024, Published-31/12/2024.

Abstract:

Disability is perceived differently in religion, mythology, and tradition. It is true that to be born without any physical or mental disability is considered a blessing, although there have been diverse viewpoints and opinions on this subject. In certain contexts, it is viewed as a consequence of divine retribution, whereas in other contexts, individuals with disabilities are regarded as the unfortunate and impoverished, rather than as esteemed individuals. The portrayal of disability in Indian mythology has resulted in a societal obstacle for individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities. Technology and science have not only redefined the perception of disability, but also played a significant role in transforming the lifestyles of disabled. *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015) which is the sequel novel of *Escape* (2008) written by Indian author Manjula Padmanabhan, showcases the story of numerous girls who were subjected to cruel assaults and had their limbs severed under the command of the powerful General. Rahmato, Shaya, Noor, Dani, Messina, Emmi, Vane, Gosami, Zara, Brahi and Tasha all are disabled girls who played important role in the construction of the Island under the supervision of empowered women Vane, Asma, Brahi, Kesh, Cha and four other mentors of this Island. These women are highly skilled technicians, including surgeons, scientists, and technocrats, who have had a significant impact on the lives of girls with disabilities.

Keywords: Impairments, Discrimination, Self-determination, Self-reliance, and Optimism.

Introduction:

Many authors have attempted to reveal the difficulties and challenges that handicapped people face in their works by writing about disability in their works. These authors have written about disability in their works. The list of authors and works in the field of literature is quite extensive, and Manjula Padmanabhan is listed among them. His book, "The Island of Lost Girls," is narration of disabled girls who are struggling to stay alive. However, they are not disabled by birth. This came about as a consequence of a brutal and despotic General.

The term "disability" encompasses all forms of impairments, limitations in activities, and restrictions in participation that impact either specific organs or body parts, or a person's overall engagement in life. This field focuses on the capacities exhibited through complex actions and behaviors that are widely recognized as fundamental aspects of daily existence. This encompasses disruptions in appropriate conduct, in personal hygiene (such as control over bodily functions, ability to bathe and nourish oneself), in the execution of other everyday activities, and in locomotor abilities such as walking. Perceptions of disability are profoundly influenced by the social and cultural norms of a community. As a result, individuals with disabilities are significantly impacted by both physical and socio-environmental factors. In previous eras, those with disabilities were regarded as outsiders within society. In the English-speaking world, both disabled and nondisabled individuals commonly view phrases like 'crippled', 'spastic', and 'mongol' as derogatory rather than retaining their original significance. The media and academic publications often employ various terminology and phrases that dehumanize and treat the disabled population as unwanted objects. This encompasses terms such as 'the handicapped', 'the impaired', 'the disabled', 'the blind', and so on. The phrase 'handicapped' was burdened with oppressive implicature, such as being referred to as 'cap in hand', which symbolized begging and charity. Terms such as disability and others still retain distortions in meaning, causing disabled individuals and their organizations to actively avoid using them. Geethu Vijayan has written an article entitled *Disability Studies: A Path Breaking Approach in Literature* in which he says: "Disability is a major concern in literature even at the dawn of its life. Disability has long been studied within the applied health sciences, framed as a medical problem needing a medical solution. It is also studied as a social problem, a negative form of being, as it prevails in the sociological study of deviance, the anthropological study of medicine and abnormal psychology" (Vijayan 15-16). This issue is intricately connected to various domains

of human existence, including medical science, anthropology, psychology, literature, and more. Several authors have illustrated disabilities in their literary works, occasionally imbuing them with optimism, while at other times seeking to reflect the difficulties and hardships through their narrative art. John Milton, Alexander Pope, Charles Lamb, Alan Marshall, Christy Brown, Helen Keller, and several other writers who contributed literature with their magnum opus.

Literature encompasses a wide range of genres, including plays, novels, fiction, and short stories, that explore the theme of disability. Examples of such works include "Tara" by Mahesh Dattani, "Moby-Dick" by Herman Melville, "A Son of Circus" by John Irvin, "The Mill on the Floss" by George Eliot, "The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and "The First Man" by Albert Camus. These captivating stories provide narratives that delve into the lives of individuals with disabilities. In her influential work *Introduction to Disability Studies* (1998), Simi Linton makes an extended argument for "setting off disability studies as a socio-political-cultural examination of disability from the interventionist approaches that characterize the dominant traditions in the study of disability" (132). The author asserts that the portrayal of disability in literature encompasses both the socio-political and cultural dimensions of society, as well as the psychological and developmental aspects of the nation. Padmanabhan's novel *The Island of Lost Girls* portrays the socio-cultural, and technical development of the artificial Island which is created by the disabled girls. *The Island of Lost Girls* illustrates the adventures of disabled girls who were either brought to the island or arrived there in order to ensure their own survival. However, none of the girls residing on this island are subjected to or marginalized and oppressed. These females are empowered through the progress of technology. The majority of girls have lost their limbs. Rahmato, Shaya, Alarie, Dani, and Messenia are the girls who experienced bodily and mental harm, devastation, and disability. Messina was completely disabled, as she had no use of her left arm and her feet were missing: "Messinia had a mechanical prosthesis in place of her left arm. Both her feet were transplanted but were mismatched from one another and pale brown by contrast to the dull mahogany of the rest of her skin" (Padmanabhan 135). Each of these girls has sustained terrible injuries, resulting in the amputation of one or two of their limbs. They are segregated in some kind and reside in a country that is predominantly governed by women. These girls were compelled to flee their homeland after damaging their limbs. Rahmato'u, their instructor, was one of the girls. Additionally, a metallic device was surgically placed beneath her throat, lodged in her skin. This gadget was a synthetic vocal synthesizer that was utilized. This voice converter

translates her original language into Unida. The mentors have integrated a voice generator into the throats of all these girls, showcasing their exceptional proficiency in technology. One can observe the act of redistributing stocks when it is shared. After arriving at this island, she says: “You! Rahmato'u said. 'You is Shay ... Sha-ya? You is first time in island. Shaya nodded before saying 'yes, in the artificial voice that emerged from her throat, She blinked rapidly, before adding, Oh! /.../... sound so different...' She touched the front of her neck. 'Its fake voice, said Rahmato'u, but is useful”. (*The Island of Lost Girl*, 136) Padmanabhan had made an effort to demonstrate to us that impairment does not necessarily imply incapacity or a barrier to living a good life. After gaining an understanding of this society, there are several examples that can be traced back to successful people who ended up leaving their name behind. Stephen Hawkins, a renowned scientist who was diagnosed with a debilitating condition known as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), is the first and main name that comes to mind. This condition has a significant impact on a person's personality, memory, and intelligence. In spite of the fact that everyone is aware that position anticipated a brief life, he passed away at the age of seventy-six and established himself as a prominent figure in the world of physics. Because he was so determined in his life, he did not let the fact that he had a disability prevent him from finding and pursuing the things that he was most passionate about. His statement published in *Readers Digest* that says: "My advice to other disable people would be concentrate on things your disability does not prevent you doing well and don't regret the things it interferes with don't be disabled in spirit as well as physically"(Hawkins 1). This statement serves as an inspiration to all individuals with disabilities worldwide. Stephen Howkins posits that the body may be disabled, but it is not under the control of individuals. However, the spirit and positive thinking are impervious to handicapping. Despite any remorse regarding disability, it is imperative that each individual focus on their objective. Manjula Padmanabhan's subsequent novel, *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015), exemplifies this type of optimistic approach. As the article *Representation of Disabilities in Indian English Fiction: A Viewpoint* “Disability and gender are representations that historians can chart over time, interpretations that philosophers can query, images that religious scholars can trace, concepts that geographers can probe, traditions that rhetoricians can contest, and fictions that literary critics can reveal.” (Singh 609)

The concept of disability can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and it can be understood differently depending on whether one is male or female. Religion provides a description in its own

unique manner, whereas scientists, rhetoricians, and geographers each have their own unique explanations for the medical conditions they study. Some find it to be positive, while others find it to be negative. But in this matter Manjula Padmanabhan's idea regarding disability is positive and very creative. Manjula Padmanabhan's dark fictional landscape and provocative storytelling highlight the constraints of tyranny and the futility of eradicating history. Manjula Padmanabhan's most recent novel shares a striking resemblance to Jennifer McMahon's acclaimed 2008 bestseller, "Island of Lost Girls." However, despite both novels exploring unsettling themes around the disappearance of girls, their narratives diverge significantly. Padmanabhan's novel is a continuation of her previous work, *Escape*, which was published in 2008, and addresses similar themes. *Escape* takes place in an unnamed country that lacks a specific identity, making it universally representative of a nation that excludes women, referring to them as "vermin". The sequel of *Escape* explores the theme of brutalities suffered by the characters and Youngest's courageous attempt to save his young daughter Meiji. It shifts the setting to "Island" - Padmanabhan's Laputa, a location where gender is constantly changing, although the predominant essence remains female. The Island serves as a refuge for women and transsexuals who have been physically harmed, providing them with a somewhat secure environment. However, like to any segregated community, it harbors concealed truths, systems of authority, and established rules. Padmanabhan is a women-centric writer, she explores the darker aspects of women's lives in her writing. The issues she raises in her works are often overlooked and unexplored by other writers of her era. The novel, *The Island of Lost Girl* can be analysed from multiple perspectives, including technological advancement, women's empowerment, sexism eco-anarchism, and disability. This paper takes a look at disability as portrayed by Manjula Padmanabhan from a unique and different angle. The islanders are physically disabled, but Padmanabhan strives to establish an optimistic approach. Her female characters are distinct from others; she never portrays them as weak, marginalized, and subjugated. In their article Basu and Tripathi had quoted the statement of Akhter, derived from *Gender Inequality and Literature: A Contemporary Issue* that says:

Within fictional narratives, this imagination created works like *Herland* (1979), *The Female Man* (1975), and more. Bearing testimony to scientifically established processes like parthenogenesis, for these authors created spaces where the process of reproduction becomes peripheral and taken care of. Women, the only gender identity existing in these societies, function perfectly to run the system. The

imagination of an all-male world essentially spawns out of non-fictional truths reflecting patriarchal hegemony, violence against women, female feticide, female infanticide, constantly deteriorating gender ratio, and so on (Basu, and Tripathi 39).

This statement elucidates that it is feasible to establish a distinct world in the current era of technology and science, and that women are capable of operating this system effectively. In this novel, Padmanabhan has vividly depicted a world that has been exclusively developed by women, in which they are able to contribute to the productivity of children despite their infirmities.

Conclusion:

It is quite evident that Padmanabhan understands and accepts the mixed gender roles, bent sexual norms, and broken sexual binaries that exist in the world today. However, even in this day and age, when female genital mutilation and male circumcision are prevalent, the concept of selfhood remains a highly complicated matter. The binary and the prevailing epistemic frameworks that define womanhood within the confines of female anatomy, the pragmatic functions of motherhood, caregiving, and fostering the domestic pace, and the reflection of femininity were not something that she was concerned with. When it comes to Padmanabhan's position, Judith Butler's writings provide further support. Within the context of feminist theory, she analyses the presupposition that is prevalent with regard to the preexisting identity of the feminist category. Despite the fact that this identification is essential in the process of launching feminist objectives, aims, and political representations inside the discourse, it simultaneously restricts the breadth of the gender spectrum. Padmanabhan is able to break free from this big narrative that is engulfed in the polarity of pitting women against males. In the work that is chosen, the relevance of the subjective association is brought to light through the characters of Meiji, Youngest/Yasmine, and Alia. They are all females; however, they are not the same as one another. They are able to harness numerous notions of exclusivity through their realities about womanhood. They are not bound by the predetermined teleological parameters that must be met in order to become a woman. It is her belief that a woman is not helpless and that she is always in need of the support and protection that patriarchy provides. The concept of a fully women-centric society is explored in this story, where women thrive and advance in their lives independently, without the need for male participation. She also demonstrates the belief that nothing is unachievable once one is determined. The mentors on the island embrace the concept of a tranquil, joyful, environmentally conscious, and forward-

thinking world for women, devoid of torture, oppression, suppression, gender disparity, and gender-related challenges.

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