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Youth Addiction from a Disability Perspective in Durjoy Datta's *Till the Last Breath*

Mrs. Anu. D, Dr. Senitha. R, Dr. M. Saji,

[1](Reg. No. 241131502048), Full-time Research Scholar in English,
Research Centre in English, S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil, 629 002, Kanyakumari District. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapathi, Tirunelveli- 627012), Tamil Nadu, India.
[2]Assistant Professor of English,
S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil, 629 002, Kanyakumari District. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapathi, Tirunelveli – 627012.
Tamil Nadu, India.
[3]Associate Professor & Head, Department of English,
S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil – 629002, Kanyakumari District. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapathi, Tirunelveli – 627012. Tamil Nadu, India.
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Abstract

Youngsters were considered as the bright lights of future. But the present condition of youngsters found to be in lot of dilemmas and struggles. They strive hard to manage their own life. Addiction towards alcohol and drugs affect them to lose their physical and mental health. In India, youth addiction has become a serious issue and the consequences faced by these individuals are highly intolerable. The prolonged usage of any drugs or alcohol will create health disorders that may lead to disability. It was made evident in Durjoy Datta's *Till the Last Breath*, the character named Dushyant Roy endured with severe pain due to Hepatic encephalopathy. The disease affected his liver and he was in immediate need of liver transplantation. The whole body organs struggled to work and so he was in physically disabled condition. All happens because of his overconsumption of Substance Use Disorders (SUDs). His vulnerable situation evokes pity over the pathetic situation of today's youngsters. The novel highlights the condition of youngsters with Substance Use Disorders and how that gradually moves towards disability. Durjoy Datta alerts youngsters to be aware of their body and the harmful consequences of Substance Use Disorders.

Addiction towards drugs and alcohol has become an incurable disease among modern youngsters. Current generation considered it as a fashion and without proper guidance and awareness youngsters lose their invaluable life at very early stages. Some youngsters trapped into this due to their family background or misleading companionship, loneliness, stress, and failures. According to WHO's 2024 news release, "The highest proportion (13%) of alcohol-attributable deaths in 2019 were among young people aged 20–39 years" (WHO).

Addiction can be analysed through a

disability-studies perspective by considering the complex interactions like psychological distress, bodily conditions, social relationships, and environmental circumstances. Substance Use Disorders produce serious and lasting impairments in psychological, physical, and social functioning. The interaction with stigma, discrimination, and social barriers contribute to face the experiences of disability.

In India, the situation of young adults who caught into addiction-causing substances was increasing day by day. "Indian society is currently undergoing another tectonic shift in its socio-economic fabric. The impact of globalization and economic liberalization (exposure to satellite television, rapid socio-economic transition and growing disposable incomes) appears to have influenced a wide-spread attitudinal shift to greater normalization of alcohol use" (Benegal 1053). Habitual usage of drugs brings several health issues and that can result in disability. "Diagnosable drug and alcohol addictions, or Substance Use Disorders (SUDs), are considered disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act"(Anderson).

Till the Last Breath presented Dushyant Roy as the epitome of how temporary pleasure would devastate the entire life. In society, Substance Use Disorders were highly targeted towards youngsters. In the twinkling years of youth, slipping in addictive drugs or alcohol would shorten their lifespan. Within disability studies, addiction is analyzed by examining how the novel expresses both the character's personal experiences and the social environment in which those experiences acquire meaning. Similar, Dushyant Roy a vibrant youth lost his stamina by habitual intake of substance use disorders. After dating for eight months with his girl friend Kajal, Dushyant found hard to balance his relationship with her. "He drank too much, he smoked too much, and he loved her too much" (33).

Kajal at the budding stage of their love believed in Dushyant that he would change. "Kajal never liked to talk about his drinking problem. She loved him, so she had to. But she had had enough. The steroids he took as body building supplements, the marijuana, the never-ending cigarettes… his addictions kept piling up" (35). At one stage Dushyant violently abused Kajal and mistreated her heavily. This incident highly damaged Kajal and she ends up her relationship with Dushyant and began to love Varun, her family friend. This information triggered Dushyant to spend more time in alcohol.

The consequence of continuous usage of drugs and alcohol brought the health condition of Dhushyant Roy worse. He had several illnesses like urinary problems, uncontrollable vomits, and seizures, at extreme level he lost his conscious and finally hospitalized. He was diagnosed with hepatic encephalopathy, a chronic liver failure. He can be cured by immediate liver transplant. In the hospital Dushyant endured with unbearable pain and emotional turmoil."'Dushyant is not doing that well. He has a fever now. The pain in the stomach is getting worse. His liver is getting worse. He has had two seizures in the last two hours. His systems are shutting down"' (76- 77). Dushyant's body organs gradually move towards disability. He was unable to breathe by himself but through a pipe that fit into a nozzle in his throat.

Dushyant suffers alone, he had no

attendants. His parents are living in village. Also they ignored him completely due to his addictive and notorious behavior. "He had no visitors. He had no friends really. In the four years and the few extra months he had spent in the college, he had made drinking buddies, smoking buddies, getting-fucked-up-with buddies, but none who would come to see him in the hospital"(5). Dushyant was treated indifferently from nurses, doctors and outsiders they considered him as a problematic patient. Through some offensive words they hurt him. It shows the stigma that prevailed in society against affected person. "The impact of SUDs on societies as it relates to health and mortality, economics and crime is profound, and it appears to be worsening" (Volkow and Blanco 203).

Youngsters without proper understanding and awareness about their life they engaged in Substance Use Disorders. Later, they used to regret for their ignorance and long for guidance and mental support. Swain stated that "The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) covers disabilities significantly impacting major life activities. This includes physical, mental, emotional, and psychological impairments".The role of society towards these sufferers was to give proper counseling and medications. But at this time society began to hurt and alienate them.

In the novel, the only person who showed care and concern towards Dushyant Roy was Pihu Malhotra, his co-patient who shares her room with him. Even though she was affected with deadly Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) she always smiles and entertains him. Moreover, as a medical student Pihu identified Dushyant's disease as cadmium poisoning. It means the body which was highly affected by toxic substances that leads to serious health problems.

Initially Pihu and Dushyant had a bitter relationship. The parental love and affection showed by Pihu's parents towards her irritated him. Dushyant's parents were in village and also had no knowledge about their son's tragic condition. One of the major reasons for his present condition was his family. His parents dreamed of their son in better position but Dhushyant's smoking and drinking habits disappointed them and they neglect him. To the contrary, Pihu's parents were always with her and the support rendered by them made her emotionally strong. Dushyant's condition was critically bad and he had no relations or friends to take care of him. So in anger he had pointed out that,

> 'I don't like you. Do you get me? I don't like the fact that you're constantly smiling when my whole body feels like its burning up, turning to ashes. I am scared to death and when I look on the other side, I see the smiling face of a carefree girl, with her parents hugging and kissing her. It's irritating. Why couldn't you just take another room and let me suffer in peace?'(99)

Eventually, Pihu and Dushyant understood their health condition and began to help each other. From the pain that he endures Dushyant learned the value of life. The selfless care and optimistic energy in Pihu transformed Dushyant's reckless attitude. More to that Pihu saves Dushyant by donating her liver to him during her death. "*She dies. I live. I cry. Where is the sense in that? I didn't even want to live*" (246). Pihu shared her last note with Dushyant in which she advised him not to waste his life. "'You

were the best room-mate ever. Now, we're 2-2. Don't waste it'" (247).

Disability in Pihu's body took her life but Dushyant purposely indulging in substance use disorders altered his body towards disability. Pihu's care and empathy towards Dushyant gives hope and he began to understand the worth of life. Dushyant realizes that addiction towards any substance may offer temporary escape or happiness whereas the genuine satisfaction and lasting joy lies in meaningful relationship, compassion and self acceptance.

Through the life of Dushyant, present generation can realize the impact of addiction in life. It also evokes deep sense to analyze the life journey of youngsters towards virtue or vice. It tends to look beyond the visible consequences of addiction and recognize the emotional struggles of the affected person. In addition to that, addiction should not be viewed as a moral failure or lack of self control, but as a distinct condition which requires compassion and care. The importance of human support and empathy towards addicted individuals would strengthen them and heal them. By engaging young peoples in social activities and awareness programs they would understand the realities of life and gain hope to face the world boldly.

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