

**Original Article**

# The Voice of the Natives in the Select Disability Literatures: A Study

<sup>1</sup>DR. D.R. EDWIN CHRISTY, <sup>2</sup>J. BHARATHIDASAN

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tamil Nadu, India.

<sup>2</sup>PhD Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tamil Nadu, India.

**ABSTRACT:** *Disability Studies have opened the doors into the gloomy autocratic world of domination, colonisation and suppression, which has engulfed the voice of the voiceless in complete darkness. This paper aims to bring out the voice of the voiceless natives, which has been suppressed and disabled for decades by the monopolistic society. The agony, sufferings and the cries of the natives have been pathetically depicted by David Rubadiri and A. M. Klein in their poems A Negro Labourer in Liverpool and Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga respectively. It also questions the existence of such unjust structures in society in an attempt to draw the attention of the world to witness the plight of the natives in this hypocritical world.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Social Disablement, Indigenous Voices, Slavery, Colonial Oppression, Women's Voices.*

## THE VOICE OF THE NATIVES

Africa is the land of the origin of the species of the world. It is the land which speaks about the evolution of humans. It is the land which has life in bounty. It is the land which has given life to this world. And it is this very land which made its mark in literature studies. Africa, which has given life in this world, has become a lifeless object of suppression and slavery. This part of the world, which has given life and voice to the world, had been ripped of its voice.

The poem A Negro Labourer in Liverpool by David Rubadiri has voiced the plight of the Negroes, who were living in complete darkness and misery. The poet stands as a witness to the sorry state of a Negro labourer working in Liverpool. The poet encounters the Negro labourer and describes his condition. The opening stanza of the poem:

“I have passed him  
Slouching on dark backstreet pavements  
Head bowed-  
Taut, haggard and worn.  
A dark shadow amidst dark shadows.” (Narasimhaiah 133, ll.1-5)

exposes the condition of the black Negroes, who virtually live in the shadows of darkness. The word “head bowed” (Narasimhaiah 133, l.3) exhibits the slavery of the Negroes. Their heads have been bowed not because of respect, but out of shame, agony and embarrassment. The last line of the first stanza, “A dark shadow amidst dark shadows” (Narasimhaiah 133, l.5) strikes the key note of their condition.

The poet has lifted his head to notice the Negro labourer, and when their eyes met, the poet finds that there is no smile, no hope and no longing on his dark negro face. This Negro labourer who represents the negro slaves has lost all possible hopes of a promising future. He gives a quick ‘piercing’ (Narasimhaiah 133, l.12) glance through the busy crowds of people and longingly searches for a face with a heart full of empathy and understanding.

The poet, after presenting a picture of the condition of the Negro labourer, now speaks out for the negro labourer in Liverpool. The third stanza is a cry for their identity:

“The negro labourer in Liverpool  
That from his motherland,  
A heart heavy  
With the load of a century's oppression,  
Gloriously sought for an identity  
Grappled to clutch the fire of manhood  
In the land of the free.  
But here are only the free dead-  
For they too are groping for a light.” (Narasimhaiah 134, ll.17-25)

The poet becomes the mouthpiece of the Negro slaves. The Negro labourer who has come from his free land to seek an identity is now heartbroken, for he has lost all his freedom. They have been loaded with oppression, suffering and torture for centuries

during their existence in this world. Africa, which has been the land of the free, has now become infertile of its freedom. Man has been denied the freedom which even the birds and animals cherish. The line "But here are only the free dead-" (Narasimhaiah 134, l.24) is very striking and makes one ponder over life after death. But in this scenario, even life after death also seems miserable, for even the dead seem to struggle for light, being buried in darkness. The negro while alive, was buried in the darkness of slavery, domination and oppression, and this darkness lingers around them even after death. One cannot express their inability and helplessness in a better striking fashion than this line.

The last stanza questions the very birth of the Negro slaves. The lines;

"Will that sun  
That greeted him from his mother's womb  
Ever shine again?" (Narasimhaiah 134, ll.26-28)

Question the law of Mother Nature, which welcomes all living creatures into this world, will it welcome the sufferings of the Negroes too? Will Mother Nature bear witness to the atrocities committed on the Negroes and still shower its blessings on this earth? Will it ever shine its prodigy? The concluding lines of the poem attempt to answer these questions:

"Not here-  
Here his hope is the shovel,  
And his fulfillment resignation." (Narasimhaiah 134, ll.29-31)

The poet knows that it cannot shine again, because the hopes of the innocent people are buried deep into the soil, and their hopes could be fulfilled only in their resignation from this world- that is, death.

The African natives are not the only ones whose voice is suppressed; likewise, other nations that were under imperialism share this platform of suppression and slavery. Canada is one among such nations that were not spared from the cruel hands of the autocratic domination. Canada, though ripe in its age unlike Africa, equally shares the brunt of pain, agony, discrimination and suppression. The natives of Canada too, have been deprived of their fundamental rights.

A.M. Klein, though Jewish in origin, does not dwell on injustice committed in particular against his own ethnic group. He grieves for the collapse of the humanist ideal. He identifies his own plight with another poignant instance of ethnic persecution. In *Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga*, A. M. Klein not only deplores the destruction of the Indian culture and tradition but also projects the helpless condition of the native Indians in the Reservation Camps.

Klein begins the poem by questioning the faded culture of the Native Indians in Canada. The opening lines:

"Where are the braves, the faces like autumn fruit,  
Who stared at the child from the coloured frontispiece?  
And the monosyllabic chief who spoke with his throat?  
Where are the tribes, the feathered bestiaries?-" (Narasimhaiah 179, ll.1-4)

brings out the true colour of their culture and language. This natural lifestyle of the native Indians has been replaced by the "classroom chalk" (Narasimhaiah 179, l.9), "French Names" (Narasimhaiah 180, l.16) and a calendar life. This change has brought in a longing for their past, which has been sold in the shops in exchange "for a traveller's den" (Narasimhaiah 180, l.25). The owners of the land were pushed to a life of beggary. The lines:

"Sometimes, it's true, they dance, but for a bribe;  
After a deal done, the bedraggled feather  
And welcome a white mayor to the tribe." (Narasimhaiah 180, ll.26-28)

brings into light how the natives dance to the tunes of the whites, not for prosperity but for mere survival.

The concluding stanza remarks about the horrid conditions of the natives in the ghettos. The following lines portray the natives as animals in the museum.

"This is a grassy ghetto, and no home.  
And these are fauna in a museum kept.  
The better hunters have prevailed. The game,  
losing its blood, now makes these grounds its crypt.  
The animals pale, the shine of the fur is lost,  
Bleached are their living bones. About them watch  
As through a mist, the pious prosperous ghosts." (Narasimhaiah 180, ll.29-35)

The natives are treated worse than the animals. They are more dead than living and buried alive with all their hopes of a bright life. They are exploited and completely drained of their energy and will to fight. The ghosts of their forefathers watch over them helplessly. The natives lead a vegetable life with no voice of their own.

Women's writing in indigenous and disability literary contexts foregrounds marginalised bodies marked by colonial displacement, racialization, and gendered oppression. The poems of David Rubadiri, such as *A Negro Labourer in Liverpool*, and A. M. Klein's *Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga* illustrate how these poems portray identities limited by socio-political forces. Rubadiri's labourer embodies economic marginalisation as social disablement that limits agency and dignity. Indigenous women writers build on this view to show how women experiencing displacement and exploitation face compounded gendered vulnerabilities. Klein's poem illustrates cultural erasure, the reservation as a metaphor for restricted identity. Indigenous women writers reclaim their voices through storytelling and resist the limited biomedical definitions of disability by framing disability as a result of colonisation and systemic neglect. They offer insights into resilience and identity reconstruction, using symbolism of land and community to resist colonial fragmentation.

## CONCLUSION

Both the poets, David Rubadiri and A. M. Klein, have voiced out the voice of the voiceless natives, which has been suppressed and disabled for decades by the monopolistic society. The agony, sufferings and the cries of the natives have been pathetically depicted by David Rubadiri and A. M. Klein in their own fashion in their poems. Their poems are not an end in themselves; rather, they kindle the spirit of humanity to witness the plight of the natives in this hypocritical world.

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