

Creative Writing – Embellishing Healing for Ailment to Establish Resurgence Among Women Cancer Survivors

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Illness is the night side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place - Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 1978.

Expressive writing is an inexorable portion of human aesthetics from time immemorial. It has a unique position in the art of creativity at all ages of life, in all cultures and in all fractions of human advancements. The history of writing comprises of an exclusive and indigenous style and procedure in each locality and in each group of survival. Prolific writing is a journey from life towards literature, blended with imagination and fantasy ornamented with the dark and bright phases of life's occurrences. It is the portrayal of the realisation of self and recognition of worldly experiences which the writer has encompassed. Writing of life and writing of the mind is something that acquires deeper analysis. The intentional reading of the writer's subjective and objective writings is connected in itself.

As T.S. Eliot observes tradition, which always accompanies the writings of any age, as a link not only with the present but also with each and every experience that a person has and had throughout his/her life, the thoughts, interests, ability, talent, perception and therefore everything that we contribute to define a person is a fraction of the general experience that the tradition, family, community, society and culture transfers from one generation to another. In this perspective, writing is no far from the genealogical perception. It is the expression of the unsaid exploration which was carried over from generation after generation. It is an outlet of not an individual's experience but of a group and therefore of a larger community. Thus the vital vivacity of the spectrum of writing has a value which is of greater importance in human life. It gives an emotional solace, a door that opens the world of imagination, aspiration, hope, freedom etc., which calms the sound and fury of the mind, the silence between the said and the unsaid, the calmness that is created to realise the self within.

Writing has the power to lead life to its completion. Above all writing could be considered as an element of healing, a solace for the disturbed, conflicting, confused, chaotic and disruptive mind. Writing becomes a consoling element, a catalyst between life and mind, which reacts to its most, in order to bring peace to the person. Writing can be considered as a medium which carries a therapeutic value which leads one to the zenith of living, envisioning the future, exploring the past and experiencing the present, expressive writing brings satisfaction and contentment to the life of the writers at any phase of life both during joy and pain, health and illness. Therefore writing becomes a mode of expression, representing human experiences at its rudimentary form.

Women and disease has a very long history to trace. The progress of women has always accompanied with struggle, oppression, protest, resistance and revolution. Women encounter immense of psycho-social threats which could be seen in their writings. Women along with their struggle for existence have been experiencing physical and psychological diseases which could be traced in the narratives written by women. Women have taken writing as a medium of expression to voice out their struggle for existence in the patriarchal society. Domestic drudgery, domination, cultural conflicts, psychological disorders, oppression etc., experienced by women has also been established in her writings. Expressive writing explores the inner self and it has become a search for identity. The world witnesses the inner conflicts and the struggle for existence and the social chaos experienced by women through the narratives. Narrative writings therefore become the space where 'She' could express herself as a whole. Narrative writing in this context has also acquired an extraordinary position in the field of healing of the mind and body especially in women. The inner struggle and the psychological chaos of women has become a cause for innumerable physical diseases and psychological turmoil. Expressive writing has always been aside to support and strengthen women to overcome and to fight back in order to make herself stable and sustainable. Writing is being taken as a defence mechanism to divert from reality, creating a world of one's own, being complacent and protecting oneself from the harsh realities of life.

Writers like Kamala Suraiya wrote her fictional autobiography “My Story” when she was hospitalised, the journey of her exploration of the self brought her back to normalcy to some extent. Sylvia Plath, through her writings bring back her emotional attacks that she carried throughout her life and through her writings she created a slight bend from her conflicting mind. Virginia Woolf introduces the stream of consciousness method to represent the chaotic mind through the fiction “To the Light House”. Even writers like Milton, Keats and Charles Lamb have written the strongest of their poetic art during the time of physical illness and emotional setbacks.

Keeping in the shelf all the writers who really made writing an ammunition, as a saviour of death, illness and psychological stroke, it is a need to analyse and understand the various aspects of how writing takes the role of a doctor, a healer or a therapist in the lives of people in order to overcome or withstand the struggle and pain which runs into their lives through physical illness.

This is an attempt to coerce through the writings and narratives of the women survivors of cancer, to explore the expressed and hidden expressions of life which has been engraved during and after the diseased condition. The agony and pain that the disease causes physically and psychologically in a person and the paradox of the self which is caught within the dichotomy of mind and body, health and sickness, happiness and sorrow, physical and psychological trauma, distress and hope, destruction and desire, suppression and expression, acceptance and seclusion, depression and expectation etc. which is being expressed through the narratives which becomes the medium of unravelling the person as an artist who is not too far from the person within is where the survivor of the disease finds the final resort.

It could be observed that the scientific and technological methods and strategies to diagnose the disease is increasing day by day on one side and the survival strategy of expressive writing is also seen progressing with various forms of narratives like biographies, memoirs, poems, fiction, documentaries, diary scriptures, blogs etc. Being published all over the world especially among women survivors.

There are now nearly ten million cancer survivors in this country, up from three million in 1971 and six million in 1986. Many live for years or decades and it is becoming impossible to ignore questions about their lives - Gina Kolata, in the New York Times, Mary K. Deshazer, *Fractured Borders*, 2005.

Life, disease, struggle, survival and literature are strung together to convey the fragmented self of the survivor. Writing brings life to the unveiled experiences that the victim of cancer suffers. An exploration of the voice of the sufferer could be depicted in the narration created by the writers through the representation of the family relationships, struggle

and survival from isolation of the mind and body, the conflict within the mind, a space created in the society by the survivors by resisting the social challenges, the affiliation and revulsion towards the concept of body, the burden of sustenance and survival, etc.

Isolation spreads the wings of trauma and seclusion in the narration, the psychological agony, the physical seclusion felt by the patient during the time of treatment, the biological separation from the prior form of the self and the confrontation towards mind, body, family, society etc. the clinical tortures in the name of treatment and the struggle experienced in cutting the path of survival for a hopeful existence of a successful tomorrow could also be traced in cancer narratives.

The threat and fear of surgery, treatment, post operative conflicts with the body, fatigue, scars, physical deformities etc, the fear of acceptance as a healthy person, as Marilyn Hacker writes “sexual arousal pulled me into my body, and my body had demonstrated its mortality...[It] made me think of death”, the introspective reflections accompanied by experience and imagination trace the struggle that women encounter while confrontational to survival. To create an identity of oneself as a cancer survivor, as reality challenges a fixed concept of identity, it is made evident that self and body are not in opposition, and that identity is created along with the presence of the physical self.

Judith Butler’s Per formative theory of gender subjectivity explores women and their performances as different from men and as per observation the weaker performances of the survivors hunt for a place to fix oneself in a context which is too far from the image of a healthy woman. Searching for a physical identity in a gender based society for the survivors is at variance. The flux between the physical body and personal identity set as a platform for a discussion.

The conflict between life and death, and the fight which the writers carry over throughout their lives, fear of death and earnestness to exist, struggling to fight back death with the realisation that it can attack life at any moment creates an uncertainty to existence, leading to existential philosophy of survival.

Audrey Lorde says “Death is a fractured border Through the center of my days”- *The Night Blooming Jasmine*.

Suppressing the true self and projecting the imaginary or the desired self can also be seen in the writings, the oppressed identity, and the cultural clashes that the survivor has realised during her lifetime and post treatment period, conflict of power and dominance in the patriarchal society is also traced in the narratives.

After the struggle and chaotic frictions, the sign of hope that has been conquered by the writers, create an aspiration about life. Overcoming all the huddles of the disease and sharing the experience of a brighter life, portraying life as unbeatable and creating a self which never perishes in any kind of traumatic situations, a birth of a new self which has grown into a heightened reality of existence can be observed through the study resulting in the victory of psychological and physical survival.

The discovery of the self overcomes all the paradoxes of life and amalgamates the fragments of reality into a bold, brighter, unified self. Thus leading with the traits of hope, optimism, self confidence, self efficiency, self esteem, accepting the positives of life along with the therapeutic curing of the mind and body, narratives become both victims and life giving claimers, proclaiming restoration.

The exploration of the self is a requirement for any person who is led into the dilemma of existence once left in the hands of intolerant realities of life like diseases which leave the question of death or survival. The need to understand the various layers of experiences felt and realised by the group of individuals who are attacked by the crucial disease cancer is inevitable. As Susan Sontag quotes, “in Georg Groddeck’s pronouncement, anticipating Wilhelm Reich, that “what is not fatal is not cancer.” – *Illness as Metaphor, 1978*.

Men and women have two varied representations and physical interventions while encroached by the disease. The psychological conflict that they experience when related to the body and self is yet to be studied from the narratives of women survivors. The dichotomy between beauty and ugliness, perfection and disruption of the body which is being glorified in all perceptions of life, the failure of acceptance of the self that is unstructured due to the intense treatments etc. attack the question of survival. Therefore it is a necessity to recognize and realise what is required to interpret the outcomes of the cancer victims. Writing therefore becomes the mode of expression of all that the writer feels, sees, observes and experiences.

The struggle encountered by the women cancer survivors and the transformation of the fragmented and chaotic self towards a content, powerful and prolific self is identified through the expressive and creative writings of the disease survivors.

As it is observed that narrative writing had become a crossing element used to break the silence between the diseased mind and the real mind. The writers used the tool of writing as a means of self defence from time immemorial. Literature explores the fact that those who were precisely attacked by physical and psychological diseases, writers like John Keats, John Milton, Sylvia Plath, Mary Shelly etc. made use of writing as a means to overcome the existing physical and psychological ailment. Schizophrenic diseases have always

depended on the scope of writing to explore the various layers of the affected mind. “The creative process is, according to Freud, an alternative to as neurosis, that is a defence mechanism protecting against neurosis, leading thus to the production of a socially acceptable source of entertainment and pleasure for the public.”, as expressed by Ana Drobot in *The Process of Creativity*. Writing creates a platform for discussing the various discourses with regard to the psychological, sociological, cultural, emotional, personal, artistic experiences of the diseased self.

Cancer Narratives express about women who have survived the dark realities of the disease. Through both expressive and creative writings they have depicted their inner urge of survival, the element of trauma, the tinge of depression and the concept of survival. Autobiographies, Biographies, Memoirs, blog writings, related to the personal self and poetry, play, fiction etc, belonging to the artistic self is also a path towards realisation of self. Susan Miller’s *My Left Breast*, Margaret Edison’s *Wit*, Audre Lorde’s *The Cancer Journal*, Anita Moorjani’s *Dying to be Me*, Nancy’s *Breast Cancer Journey*, blogspot.com. could be seen as the contributors and survivors of the disease.

The increase in the number of people who are attacked by cancer is immense in the current scenario. As per the situation, the need about the study of the narratives of the affected is inevitable. The group though insignificant, their voice has to be heard for a better possible existence. A new reading of the perception of body which has been glorified at all levels of life is also being questioned making people think about the alternative. The psychological trauma, method of overcoming death, surpassing fear, therefore leading through a metamorphosis of better human being rather than compartmentalising to gender restrictions are the issues being analysed and it stays relevant among the diseased in the society through the writings of the survivors. Therefore it could be realised that creative writing has an inevitable role to play in bringing a about the effect of healing among the survivors of cancer.

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