



## Embellishing the discourse of agony into success, in Graphic Illness Memoir To Cancer with Love

Julie Dominic A

Assistant Professor and Head

Department of English

Little Flower College

Guruvayoor

### Abstract

Representing agony in the form of memoirs are quite a common genre that are prevalent since early times in literary space. Illness, as a fact and struggle to survive as a reality is being represented in fiction regularly. Experimenting literary genres have become a new method of representing the self. In recent days specialities in signifying agony and pain through Graphic memoirs have become eye catching experience in literary scenario. To Cancer with Love, an Indian Graphic Illness Memoir by Neelam Kumar has created a land mark in presenting the gray sides of life into the most powerful and creative hues of existence. Meandering the shades of life of a cancer victim into the brightest colours of life has made the Memoir specific in creating a new perspective of reading experience and interrogates the prevailing style of writing which triggers the emotions of dark realities.

**Keywords** : Gender Studies, Trauma Literature, Hope Theory, Performance theory, Disease Literature, Graphic Medicine

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.

*The Cancer with Love*, of Neelam Kumar, an Indian writer represent the various shades of life which are represented through the graphic Memoir which discloses her deepest emotions that she handles through the brightest colours in print. The graphic representations which creates an interest among the readers convey the sense of acceptance of reality and the reception of the self through the comical descriptions of animation and graphical images used to convey the message of the darkest days of the struggle which Neelam Kumar acquaints with through her uncertainties and absurdities, when struck by the most life threatening disease *Cancer*.

Beginning with the lines “ This place is so scary...why am I here” , in a night mare, reveals the fear in her mind that is presented through the dark images and strange graphical presentations, the dark shades with a tinge of black reveals the uncertainty. The shades representing the nostalgic moments of the past in Eastman colours of graphical display gives a soothing effect to the reader and it articulates about the care and love which she received from her father and which the writer still yearns for is commendable.

“ C'mon superwoman! You can do it! Remember, you have nerves of steel!” the words picked from her conversation with the world through social media, shows the inner strength established in the writer, as superwoman. As Judith Butler quotes in the essay, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, “ One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well”, expresses the privilege of being unique in action from that of all who were formerly present and of those who are yet to come in the life of the writer.

It is represented in *Hope Theory: Rainbows in the mind* by C.R.Snyder, “ ...high – hope women performed better on a cancer facts test than low – hope women.”, In the words of Neelam in a restaurant after her chemo started, as she says, “i'm telling you: we look very hip and cool” this power in Neelam created the energy to overcome all huddles set on her due to the disastrous disease. But as a super woman, Neelam fought fearlessly and optimistically as she reveals” Each time I found myself in deep waters...I sat still and prayed. Within me, I found a power...” The strength in her words exposed through the graphical presentation of a tortoise peeping out from the pond, brings out the real strong self within. With immense faith, Neelam was successful in swimming out of the painful and fearsome situations that choked her through illness.

As her last few lines convey, “ Life is a challenge to cast off our Transient and manifest our true selves-that of radiant beings filled with immense powers and unlimited potential, Yes! We can overcome every adversity” reveals the element of hope that prevails in the life of Neelam which has helped her to bring herself out of all adversities, developed and manifested through Cancer.

## Bibliography

Kumar, Neelam. *To Cancer, with Love: My Journey of Joy*. Hay House Publishing, 2015.

DeShazer, Mary K. *Fractured Borders: Reading Women's Cancer Literature*. USA: University of Michigan Press, 2005. Print.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Vintage Books. 1979. Print.

Edgar, Andrew and Peter Sedgwick. *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Nayar, Pramod. K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. New Delhi: Longman, 2010. Print.

Eco, Umberto. *How to Write a Thesis*. England: MIT Press, 2014. Print.

Snyder, Charles. *Snyder's Hope Theory: Rainbows in the mind*. *Psychological Enquiry*, 13. 4 (2002): n.pag. web. 13 Dec. 2016.

Butler, Judith. *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution : An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*. *Theatre Journal*. Vol.40, No.4. Dec 1988.