

Attaining Disabled's Utopian Space: A Study on Sharon M Draper's *Out of My Heart*

S. Jenitta

Reg. No. 21122014012018

Research scholar,

PG and Research Department of English,

A.P.C Mahalaxmi College for Women

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundarnar University

Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli- 627012

Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

The article discusses the ways to attain utopian space. The disabled people attain the utopian space with the assistance of inclusive education, accessibility, assistive technology, positive self-traits, a supportive social environment, and cultural representation. Generating a utopian space for disabled people means designing inclusive, equitable environments where people with disabilities can flourish without facing barriers, stigma, or marginalization. Inclusive education encourages the disabled to learn, unlearn, and explore hidden skills. When the disabled get access to go everywhere without peer support, it offers them a sense of independence. Assistive technology clubs its hands with the disabled to experience the inexperienced deeds. The disabled kids with positive self-traits live life happily. The supportive environment includes supportive parents, friends, teachers, and relations who promote disability pride and challenge internalized ableism. It further deals with the ways in detail.

Keywords: Utopian Space, Assistive Technology, Inclusive Education, Inclusive Society and Self-traits.

Assistive technology is a significant term in disability that defines adaptive, assistive, and rehabilitative devices for disabled people to do daily work comfortably. In *Assistive Technologies: Principal and Practice*, Albert M. Cook defines AT as “The provision and development of AT are

about fitting the person to the technology. Rather, they are about using a process with the outcome of meeting the needs of the user when engaging in relevant activities across necessary contexts. Central to this principle is the recognition that the user of the technology is in control of her own life.” (123). Disabled people face circumstances during the activities of daily living. The activities of daily living include eating, bathing, grooming, and dressing. The insiders rely on the outsiders a lot to do their routine and go outside. That is where they are in need of assistive technology to fulfil their need on their own without others’ help.

Assistive technology lets the disabled experience the unexperienced things independently. It makes them feel like they are fully functional and accessible. The disabled people with assistive technology discover the world without others’ help. They gain self-esteem and confidence when they act without others’ support. It solves the problems of the disabled with communication, education, learning, social interaction, mobility, and seating. Due to assistive technology, they get a more easy-going lifestyle.

The book *Out of My Heart* has emphasized the role of assistive technology to live a regular life for the disabled. Melody’s Medi-Talker breaks her communication barriers, and she says, “I can type just about anything that pops into my head, then push the speak button, and Elvira will say it for me” (OMM 6). There are super supportive toilet seats, the big special pool with warm water, and a special shower chair in the camp for disabled kids. As a result of assistive tools in the camp, the campers feel independent. Melody’s feeling of taking the shower independently has been described below.

They had special shower chairs just for kids like me. It still felt weird having a total stranger see me naked, but I just shrugged it off. It is what it is, Dad always says. Trinity rolled me in, set my shower gel and sponge in the basket attached to this shower chair, and let me

wash up without her. I really appreciated that—I'm way too old to have anybody washing me! Mom had packed pink peppermint shower gel, and the whole washroom area smelled like melted candy by the time I was finished. (OMH 123)

Charles, a fellow camper of Melody, gets an incredible wheelchair with updated features. Melody's remarks on Charles' wheelchair that "His wheelchair was incredible—he pushed a button, and it lifted him to an almost standing position! ... His head wobbled a little, and his arms seemed to be connected by invisible puppet strings" (OMH 56). Santiago Delgado has a wheel with Medi-Talker just like Melody's, but his wheelchair can be turned into a motorcycle too. All the special kids in the camp have got extraordinary assistive tools to act independently.

Regardless of individual differences, an inclusive society is one in which everyone has equal access to resources, rights, and opportunities. The article "Inclusive Societies" by Lutfiyya and Bartlett reveals the aims of inclusive society that "it embraces diversity and a desire for equality." Rooted in the principles of social justice, inclusive societies afford all individuals and groups, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, ability, religion, immigration status, and socioeconomic status, access to and full participation in society" (2). It is predicated on the notion of social justice and the conviction that all people ought to have full access to society. An inclusive society for disability promotes equality in education, jobs, social resources, and other fields too. The primary role of an inclusive society for the impaired is to promote awareness about disability. With the support of an inclusive society, the impaired people get the opportunity to enjoy every single movement as the insiders do.

Playgrounds present a special chance to promote a child's social, physical, emotional, and cognitive development. When an inclusive playground is well-designed, it allows kids and adults of all skill levels to play together and interact. The article "Children's Usage of Inclusive

Playgrounds: A Naturalistic Observation Study of Play” narrates, “Inclusive play opportunities should allow for children to play with adults and peers but should also support solitary play for a child who, for example, is experiencing overstimulation or is seeking a place to retreat” (2). It offers the space for the disabled to develop physical growth and social interaction. Melody and his friends become excited by seeing the inclusive playground. Exclusive features specially added in the playground are described below, which makes Melody and her friends excited.

Inclusive education is the learning environment for all the students regardless of difference and disability. It aims to teach children with disabilities alongside their peers without impairments by attending to the various requirements of all students. The key principles of inclusive education are valuing diversity, promoting participation, addressing barriers, and fostering a sense of belonging. The article “Inclusive Education: A Foundation for Equality and Empowerment at the Elementary Stage” explains the benefits of inclusive education that are stated below:

The benefits of inclusive education at the elementary stage are manifold. Firstly, it promotes social cohesion and acceptance, instilling empathy, understanding, and respect for differences from an early age. Children learn to appreciate and celebrate diversity, breaking down stereotypes and fostering a culture of inclusivity and belonging. Moreover, inclusive classrooms facilitate peer learning and collaboration, where children with diverse abilities learn from each other and develop essential life skills such as cooperation, communication, and teamwork. (3)

Partial inclusion and full inclusion are the two types in inclusive education. Partial inclusion involves students spending the majority of the day in regular classrooms, while full inclusion involves all services being provided in regular classrooms.

Athena, campmate of Melody from *Out of My Heart*, is obsessed with ballet dance. She is affected with Down syndrome, which comes under intellectual disability. Her family is her huge support in fulfilling her desires. When she requests her mom to put her in a ballet class, the society understands Athena's inner spirit and accepts her in a dance studio. Her desire has been fulfilled when the teacher and the fellow dance mates accept her in a way that she is. The below lines narrate the kind nature of the inclusive society with the special kid Athena.

So, Athena went to her first ballet class. Her mom brought her special pink shoes and a black leotard. At her first class, Athena was shy, but the teacher and the other dancers were so nice. And the music was very pretty. So, Athena learned to turn, lift her arms, and point her toes. She learned to turn, and lift her arms, and point her toes. She learned how to take a bow at the end. Dancing made Athena smile every day. (OMH 290)

With the aid of rehabilitation technology, upbeat environments, and a positive outlook, people with disabilities can have joyful and stress-free lives despite psychological and social obstacles, stigmatized society, and poor self-esteem. The living conditions of disabled people become utopian as society becomes inclusive and cognizant of their needs. Insiders can enjoy and live the same life as outsiders by confidently and self-advocate approaching uncharted territory. Therefore, in environments that are inclusive, independent, and assistive, the utopian space for the disabled emerges.

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