

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Defeating the Stigma of Disability through Determination in Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Dev Narayan Sapkota

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

October 2012

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Letter of Recommendation

Dev Narayan Sapkota has completed this thesis entitled, “Defeating the Stigma of Disability through Determination in Helen Keller’s *The Story of My Life*”, under my supervision. He carried this research from January 2012 to October 2012. I hereby recommend this thesis be submitted for viva voce.

Mr. Sharad Chandra Thakur

Supervisor

Date: 08/10/2012

Tribhuvan University
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Central Department of English

Letter of Approval

This thesis, entitled, “Defeating the Stigma of Disability through Determination in Helen Keller’s *The Story of My Life*”, submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Dev Narayan Sapkota has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head, Central Department of English

Date: _____

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Dev Narayan Sapkota

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Abstract

This thesis talks about challenging and defeating the discourse of disability fabricated by the so-called “normal” majority in Helen Keller’s *The Story of My Life*. The socio-cultural discourse devaluates and stigmatizes the undesired differences or those who do not meet the “normalcy parameters” as “disabled”. Disability (undesired differentness) is misinterpreted as “the lack”, “bodily inadequacy”, or “misfortune” to be compensated for through pity and sympathy rather than a civil rights model, and the people with disabilities are regarded as “the other”, “deviant”, “inferior”, “passive”, “weak”, “awkward”, “savage”, “less than human”, and so forth with all negative connotations. But, my point is that our real human bodies are exceedingly diverse in—size, shape, color, texture, structure, function, development, and so on—and they are constantly changing. So, we can no longer essentialize the body. Instead, the society and culture essentializes or idealizes the body and makes negative imputations to the undesired differences and overshadows the abilities with the marks of disgrace which is devalued and deeply discrediting. Hence, disability is merely a socio-cultural web of meanings rather than a biological given. It is simply a discourse created by the so-called “normals” to justify their false “superiority” or “ability”. Thus, disability is neither “the lack of ability”, nor “the different ability”; rather it is the diversity of human. Helen Keller, a visually as well as hearing impaired (“deaf-blind”) girl who never thinks she has “disabilities” and challenges and defies all cultural abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, low-expectations, and the negative attitudes that the society and culture historically had towards the people with disabilities (undesired differences).

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