



**Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596**

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

---

**Autobiographical Elements in Unfamiliar into the Familiar by  
Reshma Qureshi**

**Vanza Ketan Punjabhai**

Research Scholar,

Dept. of English & CLS,

Saurashtra University, Rajkot (Gujarat) India.

[vanzaketan@gmail.com](mailto:vanzaketan@gmail.com)



## Abstract

Victim blaming was, and still is, commonplace in countries like India where disabilities are viewed as God's punishment for one's previous transgressions. Only if the impaired individual and society work together to establish the "new normal" does Susan Lonsdale believe that the second meaning of being disabled comes to light. It's horrifying to become crippled as a result of an acid attack because it mars a person's character as well as their appearance. Reshma Qureshi's life story depicts this. Because of this, she has a purpose in her life thanks to various stigma management tactics that she employs. Her efforts are aided by a group of "normal" people, who help her succeed. If the society of the normal supports and accommodates the needs of the disabled, they may rise to prominence. Reshma's autobiography serves as a wake-up call to society, imploring it to go above and beyond its current set of legal and unwritten rules.

**Keywords:** Disability, Disability Pride, Infantilisation, New Normal, Normalization, Stigma Management Techniques, Victim Blaming

For Susan Lonsdale, in *Women and Disability: The Experience of Physical Disability Among Women*, the status of being disabled has two distinct meanings: Having a disability might be seen as a disadvantage, which can lead to stigmatisation. "Overcoming enormous challenges, leading to a sense of achievement and fulfilment, is another meaning attributed to disability." A new social and political group for individuals with impairments can arise. " (Lonsdale 1). When a person with a disability decides to reshape society's perceptions, the latter connotation comes into play. It is via her book, *Being Reshma: The Extraordinary Story of an Acid-Attack Survivor Who Took the World by Storm*, that Reshma Qureshi shows how she has overcome society's preconceived notions about people with disabilities and created a "new normal." To create a society that is truly inclusive, it is necessary to add more components and aspects to the existing rules.

This distinction between "normal" and "abnormal" appears most frequently in Disability Studies when it comes to mental and physical health. The social order pursues the perfection and fullness of man's physical form. According to cultural norms, a perfectly normal human body is one that has all of its physical traits completely developed and without fault. As a result, they may be considered as 'defects and undesirable'...as well as childish and asexual." (Taub 160). Stigmatized bodies are eventually categorised as impaired. When the medical model of impairment is used, it lends credence to the labelling. A person's



physical appearance and gender are intertwined notions. Disabled men's and women's bodies are not included in the male and female bodies list. Compared to the status of a disabled man's body, the status of a woman's body in the patriarchal social system will be significantly lower.

A woman's physical beauty is highly important in the society because of this. Women with disabilities are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem due to their disabilities. There may be a wide range of levels, depending on the nature of the condition and when it was first discovered. "Many disabled people...are comfortable with who they are, and they do not wish to be fixed or cured", according to Tobin Siebers in Disability Theory (4). People who become disabled later in life have difficulty developing this mindset, whereas those who are disabled at birth have an easier time. An acquired disability has a profound effect on women's lives, and Reshma Qureshi is an excellent example of a woman who begins to take pleasure in her impairment at a later date. "The series of events that followed [seem] like a haunted film set that keeps playing on loop..." she says. Reliving the events over and over again helped me understand how things may have gone a lot differently" (Qureshi 71). As a result of the acid attack, her identity shifts from a seventeen-year-old girl to a disabled lady. As she puts it, "This single event completely transforms her life."

A woman's worth...is often judged by her looks and her ability and willingness to be a dutiful wife and mother. By charring me alive, I think Jamaluddin believed he had insulted my entire family... no matter where I went, people would shun me and my family, labelling me immoral... they insulted my situation by suggesting that no man would carry out such a vicious attack without cause (Qureshi 143).

When she was a victim, she developed a bad self-image because women's self-image is heavily dependent on their looks. She begins to see herself as a resurrected being. Women place a high value on their physical appearance. The same holds true for the self-perception of a woman born with a disability. This means she may avoid developing a poor self-image as a result. A woman who has absorbed society's view of disability may have to reassess her self-image if she becomes impaired. In Qureshi's work, this is shown when she imagines her future. To her, it will be futile to try to imitate the picture of the ideal lady. Clearly, her self-esteem has been damaged when she refers to herself as a "living curse" and calls herself a "stray dog." A negative self-image can arise due to infantilization, in which society treats people with disabilities as children. To adhere to infantilization, those with disabilities are permanently reliant on others



for their well-being.

Others around them even make decisions for them. When a lady is involved, things get even worse. Reshma states, "Without asking me a single question, the doctor asked the nurse to hand him a pair of scissors," as an example of when she may lose control over her own body. I watched the final vestiges of my self-respect melt away from me" (Qureshi 91). She also repeats the trauma when people tell her about the accident and chat about her future while assuming she is invisible. Wasn't it obvious to them that I was in pain and enraged, despite my blindness? The following is from Qureshi (104). She is in agony because of the hopeless comments she hears about herself and the stigmatisation and infantilization she has endured. Disabled women respond to society's expectations about physical attractiveness in two ways, according to Taub et al. Emotional response and stigma control are a couple of examples. Reshma's life storey contains numerous instances of her becoming enraged at herself and others. As a result of their frustration and resentment, the participants isolate themselves from others. Similarly, Reshma stops talking to even close friends and family members since they are overly protective of her. This is compounded by victim blaming, in which the disabled are treated as criminals by society. "I was being treated like the criminal, me, the victim of a horrific, nightmarish crime," she adds, "because of the anger in me" (Qureshi 84). Reshma's dissatisfaction with her appearance and her existence demonstrates her preoccupation with her shortcomings and the public's impression of her.

There are several ways that can be used to lessen the negative connotations associated with disability. Disguise, diversion, and normalisation are the three basic methods used to combat the stigma of disability. She doesn't hide her physical appearance, but Reshma stays away from social gatherings. Laila's presence prompts her to normalise her situation. It's a plan that aims to re-educate the 'normals' and redefine stigma." In order for normalisation to be successful, the disparaging trait must lose its stigmatising quality" (Taub 170). In a variety of situations, she finds solace in Laila's counsel. Only with the support of the general public can normalisation be achieved. Dismissing infantilisation and unduly pitying those with disabilities might lead to normalisation. A study by Anita Ghai on India's disability population deserves attention. People still believe that "disability" indicates a "lack" or "flaw," which results in a "significantly diminished capability," even if disability has gotten the medical halo in the country. A common stereotype of handicapped individuals is that they are suffering from divine judgement as a result of their own sins (Ghai 51). Disabilities are stigmatised and blamed in Reshma's worldview because of the social and cultural



context in which she lives.

Normalization is difficult in such a cultural setting. The most horrific kind of violence and disability in the country is acid-attack, which affects both the victim's physical look and his or her moral standing. Reshma's aim is difficult to accomplish, but it will be a monumental achievement if she succeeds. For normalisation to work, people with disabilities must stop focusing on their limitations and start appreciating what they can do with their bodies. When Reshma first meets Laila, Ria, and Mehr, the other acid-attack survivors, she performs a similar gesture. Having the opportunity to meet Ria and Mehr, two people who are considered "normal" in society, gives her a sense of purpose and confidence. "Not once did [Ria] look at me and sigh or treat me like a broken doll" (Qureshi 167), and "I asked [Mehr] what university life was like and she told me in entertaining detail" (Qureshi 167). In the end, you'll get there. And that's how I first started thinking about going to college" (Qureshi 170). Reshma's increased self-confidence enables her to see that there are many other qualities of herself that need to be brought to light, not only her impairment. To make it simpler for the public, the disabled individuals must begin to distract their focus away from their disability. After saying, "I wanted to channel my anger towards making a positive change," Reshma prompts herself to socialise in order for herself and people like her to become more familiar to the public and re-educate "normals." She hopes to avoid any more acid attacks in the future. This way, it can be determined who is responsible for a person's physical or mental impairment.

The unfamiliarity with which the rest of the world experiences a person in a physically altered body causes fear and hysteria. Normalization aims to familiarise the strange with the familiar in order to bring about a posthuman civilization that includes everyone. Disabled people are more recognisable to the general population if they are frequently featured in the media, which lowers the level of anxiety associated with a disabled body. A system where victims are frequently blamed slows down this process. People don't want to get to know these bodies. "Something in people's soul shuddered at the sight of acid-attack survivors," writes Reshma, "and on many occasions, social media sites...have removed photographs and videos of survivors because someone would flag certain content as 'graphic' and report it" (Qureshi 179). Despite the adverse environment, a collective effort can effect change. For Reshma, this campaign serves as an opportunity to begin the normalisation process.



# Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

---

"The campaign's concept was straightforward. This might be a great opportunity for people to learn about acid assaults in India from a survivor of one (Qureshi 173). Reshma sees her life's work as ending the selling of acid over the counter as a way to prevent acid attacks. In today's society, women are expected to pay attention to their physical appearance in order to be considered desirable, so the idea that an acid-attack survivor would provide beauty training seems absurd. There is no need for a crippled woman to mimic 'normal' female behaviour. An acid attack survivor's face can no longer be "an emotional burden to look at" if the campaign receives enough public attention. It's (Qureshi 180).

Disability pride is an important part of normalisation. Both are necessary for the other to work properly. Only when they have a goal in life can people with disabilities be proud of their disabilities. Normalization and social integration are necessary steps in achieving this goal. Reshma feels proud of her acid-attack survivor status only when society accepts her as she is. When Mr. Suri, the owner of LaLiT Hotel, offers Reshma and her fellow survivors work at his hotel, he provides a window into the social shifts taking place. It's clear from his words that he doesn't want anyone to be kept from the world.

This is true for all types of disabilities. As soon as society no longer forces the crippled to live on the edges of society, they may break free of their stigmatised status. There are still weird people because society has a hard time appreciating variation rather than conformity.



# Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: ROAD & Google Scholar

---

## Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage, 2011.
- Ghai, Anita. "Disabled Women: An Excluded Agenda of Indian Feminism." *Hypatia*, Vol.17, No.3, pp 49-66, 2002.
- Lonsdale, Susan. *Women and Disability: The Experience of Physical Disability among Women*. Macmillan, 1994.
- Qureshi, Reshma. *Being Reshma: The Extraordinary Story of an Acid-Attack Survivor Who Took the World by Storm*. Macmillan, 2018.
- Siebers, Tobin. *Disability Theory*. University of Michigan, 2008.
- Stoller, Robert J. *Sex and Gender: The Development of Masculinity and Femininity*. Karnac, 1974.
- Taub, Diane E et.al. "Body Image Among Women with Physical Disabilities: Internalization of Norms and Reactions to Nonconformity." *Sociological Focus*, Vol.36, No.2, pp 159-176, 2003.