

FATHOMLESS OCEAN

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OPINE OF BEAST'S FIERCENESS IN *SPEAK* BY LOURIE HALSE ANDERSON

S.SHOBANA

Alice Sebold says, "You save yourself or you remain unsaved". Though none is dependent according to this independent world, so many people suffer by sexual assault. It becomes one of the decisive social problems. It is a crucial stage that many countries try to solve scrupulously. Women and girls are sexually assaulted not only by strangers but also by their surrounding men. Only some victims are brave enough to report about sexual offending. Therefore, knowing about the calamity of sexual violence and its awareness has been concentrated everywhere.

Literature is an expressing mode of artistic works as well as a powerful tool to enlighten the society. It's in the author's hand to stimulate readers to be aware of surroundings effectively. In order to specify the crucial problems of women in society, this paper deals with children literature related to sexual assault themes through the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. Anderson is the bestselling author of New York Times and talented in handling tough subjects with sense and humor. Her books, *Speak* and *Chains* are finalists of National Book Award. She was honored with the 2009 Margaret A. Edward Award.

Speak is a story about Melinda Sordino, a high school girl, who is raped by senior boy at an end of summer party. Melinda is companionless and ignored by all her friends as a result of breaking up the summer party by calling the cops to report her rape incident. But, she runs off before reporting the crime and keeps it as secret. She starts her life in a high school with trauma.

Melinda, the thirteen-year-old girl, feels shame, guilt and she thinks safe by being alone. Her inadequate knowledge about rape, she starts thinking that it's her fault of being raped. She truly believes that she has to take responsibility for being raped. Her discomfiture and humiliation are exposed through her thought about herself. In her English class, she thinks that she is akin to Hester, the protagonist, in *The Scarlet*

Letter. Hester Prynne has been found guilty of disloyalty. To exist with dishonor in public, she must wear a scarlet letter 'A' on her dress to make her feel shame as a punishment and stands on gallows for hours and hours. Nevertheless, her secret remains unrevealed.

Similarly, Melinda's mind is also filled with humiliation and embarrassment. She thinks, "I can see us, living in the wood, her wearing that 'A', me with an 'S' maybe, 'S' for silent, for stupid, for scared, 'S' for silly, for shame" (Anderson 118). She thinks that she has a similarity with Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Instead of having herself with a letter 'A' like Hester, Melinda ingloriously posts herself with a letter 'S' to stand for her silly, stupid and scared. It implies that she incriminates herself for attend that summer party and she should have been quiet. As a result, her heart is deeply dying as she expresses her feeling, "they [feelings] are chewing me alive like an infestation of thought, shame, mistake" (Anderson 146).

Thus, Melinda decides to keep silent and never talks with anyone. She thinks that she deserves nothing and so she deviates herself from her surroundings. Her depression of that summer party doesn't allow her to speak, learn, work and sleep. She questions herself, "I just want to sleep. A coma would be nice or amnesia. Anything, just to get rid of this, these thoughts, whispers in my mind. Did he rape my head, too?" (Anderson 153).

Allison N Sinanan says that childhood sexual trauma can have a profoundly annihilating effect upon the victim. Some persons seem to be harmless while others can be greatly affected. Sexual trauma can impact many of the normal developmental processes of childhood; typically exhibited by emotional or behavioral features that show distress. Victims of child sexual abuse attempt numerous efforts to psychological escape from the abuse and cognitive efforts at coping. Melinda in *Speak* is the best illustration for Allison's sayings. Melinda's depressed mind stresses her to stop talking and it affects her individuality, happiness, confidence and self respect. Her melancholy state stays with her as silence for months and months.

Heather, a girl enters in her life as a selfless friend. Melinda does whatever Heather wants, but Heather too breaks her friendship with selfish thoughts. Melinda is being alone once again. She always imagines Maya Angelou as her companion because they both have come across the same crisis. Every notion of Melinda shows the depressed state of mind. Her thoughts are totally intertwined with that sexual violence.

Melinda feels comfortable only in her art class. So she spends much time to draw a tree with different postures by an encouragement of her art teacher Mr. Freeman. Ivy becomes her companion in her art class. Once she has prepared a report on suffragette (A woman advocate of women's right to vote in 20th century) for her assignment. Through this report, David, her lab partner kindles her thoughts to speak out. It starts lighting the sparkles of her notions. Somehow, Melinda begins to do her best and she comes up from her depression slowly. She initiates realizing the faultless heart of herself. Her confidence level improves day by day and she decides to opine the reality which happened on that summer party.

This idea shows clearly of the concernness about safety, Melinda determines to tell Rachel, her ex-best friend, who now dates with Andy Evans, the rapist, about her rape incident at the summer party in order to alert her not to step on Melinda's footprint. She hopes that Rachel would believe her and get away from him. Unfortunately Rachel misunderstands that Melinda made up a story because of envy and anger. Melinda's goodwill is picturized as a plan for revenge of a jealous girl. Rachel deeply trusts that her boyfriend, Andy Evans, could not be a rapist.

Evans, a good looking, rich and white man, is a person with some characteristics that are always looked over of rape accusation by people. According to Mulliken (2006), African Americans and Mexicans who have bad images in Societies are always accused of being rapists. With this sort of belief, Evans is hardly seen as a rapist. Therefore, Rachel is thoroughly angry at Melinda and says, "Lair! I can't believe you. You are jealous that I'm popular and I'm going to prom and so you lie to me like this. And you sent me a note, didn't you? You are so sick" (Anderson 170). It expresses that Melinda's benevolence is valueless because Rachel sees it as a revenge of her envious ex-friend.

Besides that Rachel's faithless words wipe out her courage to speak the truth. Her rape case is seen as a lie of a jealous and malicious girl who only does it for her own advantage. Her experience is diminished as unworthy, and again it affirms her that people may not trust her as she ponders "I got my hopes up halfway through the conversation with Rachel – that was my mistake. It was like smelling the perfect Christmas feast and having the door slammed in your face, leaving you alone in the cold" (Anderson 171). Repeatedly, psychological trauma by sexual assault has exposed through the depressed character Melinda as Allison says.

As feminists like Cahill, 2001; MacKinnon, 1989; Scully, 1990 are the vanguards in rape crisis centers. Feminist writers are responsible for educating the public about sexual assault dynamics and prevention. Thus, the mantra "rape is about power and control, not sex" becomes widely adopted, turning out, in fact, standard wisdom. Over the years this concept has not been broadly subjected to analysis or critique within feminist circles, with the few exceptions to be explored later.

In Andy Evans' point of view, he never does anything wrong. Evans determines that Melinda's sexual assault experience is not rape, but it is just misunderstanding and disagreement between Melinda and him. Evans, the rapist, also defends his sexual violence actions and he blames on Melinda. He says:

You have a big mouth, you know it? Rachel blew me out the prom, giving me some bullshit story about how I raped you. You know that's a lie. I never raped anybody. I don't have to. You wanted it just as bad as I did. But your feelings got hurt, so you started spreading lies, and now every girl in school is talking about me like I'm some kind of pervert. You've been spreading that bullshit story for weeks. What's wrong, ugly, you jealous? Can't you get a date? (Anderson 180).

All his actions affirm that he is a sort of beast and his actions are the reactions of beast's fierceness. He has not accepted his faults and wrong doings and he starts blaming the victim suffered by him.

At last, Melinda becomes strong enough to speak out again of Andy
beast's ruthlessness to protect other girls from his fierceness. Fortunately,
girls in her school realize the fierceness of Andy beast and become alert
to be safe from him. Subsequently, to protect children from distorted
beliefs as Melinda, school, parents and authorities should help preparing
children to become socially responsible people who can live in realities.
Kurt Cobain says:

Rape is one of the most terrible crimes on earth and it happens
every few minutes. The problem with groups who deal with rape
is that they try to educate women about how to defend themselves.
What really needs to be done is teaching men not to rape. Go to
the source and start there.

As the saying of Kurt Cobain, This start would be one of the best
ways to get rid of such sexual assault. Each one in this society is
responsible to teach men, women and themselves to make flawless
society.

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