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**A PAINFUL SEARCH OF GENDER IDENTITY IN JULIE ANN PETER'S LUNA**

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**Abstract**

This paper deals with the struggle of Luna who tries to hide himself in the name Liam and is not able to face the world as he wishes to. The gender that he tries to be will not be accepted by the society when he identifies himself to be a girl inside and is scared to live the life he wishes to and the struggle that he undergoes to face the world in the identity he wishes to be is what the paper deals with.

**Keywords:** Painful Search, Gender Identity, Julie Ann Peter's LUNA

**Introduction**

The story deals with the boy who searches for his identity, within his dual identity. The boy who changes his name into female as "Luna" from "Liam". The name "Luna" means moon. He is compared to moon light because he only reveals his true self in the night. His identity is considered by Regan, his lovable sister as, "It must be horrible to be in the wrong body, to have this dual identity".(Peters 2). *Luna* is the first young adult novel to capture the trials and tribulations faced by teenagers which also called as GID (Genetic Identity Disorder).

It mainly deals with gender identity and how the self is searching for his identity which stopped him to interact with the society. "I am still rock solid convinced that I am one hundred percent female. It's a puzzler", says Jenifer Finnley Boylan about transgender. It is unable to understand Luna's attempts to collapse her two selves by choosing truth as Luna, or over performance Liam. Regan who is a sister of Liam was also not able to understand, but Luna needs a change in her life by showing up her real identity to the society.

When Luna moves to Seattle for her new birth which brings out an anti- essentialist view of gender, in which biology does not always correlate with sexuality or identity. The novel seems to depict a separation between Luna and Liam in terms of performance and inartistic thinking. Regan, who is the best supporter of Liam as well as the narrator of the novel, demonstrates that, Liam is deviator of the normative expectations of masculinity.

Luna believes in the ability to shape the self rather than suffering from the woes of the biological determinism, unlike Regan; who believes initially that "Nobody knows that you can't change your destiny" (Peters 60). Even though Liam wants to be a girl in the society he lives in stops him to be so. Transgender refers to the widest imaginable range of gender variant practices and identities in this novel. Julie Anne Peters discusses three major problems in this novel, they are "How is transgender reflected? What are the causes of becoming transgender? What are the impacts of transgender? " As researched to the theory of transgender by Susan Stryker describes the genetic identity disorder which contains disturbance.

Julie Anne Peters says that, Regan would be Luna's confident throughout her life and in that way she could see and relate to people, and childhood manifestations of being born as a transgender. The plot is told through Regan and also through a series of flash backs that are triggered. She witnesses struggle to unleash Luna, in terms of Liam's narrative structure. The delivering of messages through flashbacks lightly the acceptance of transition by Liam to Luna explains the physical struggle of being into a body that one does not fit into.

As Luna's self-identity does not really change over the course of the novel. "Most girls spend hours and hours working on themselves so they'll be striking, eye-catching, desirable. Liam could give everything one day as a plain, ordinary girl". (Peters 54). Even though she looks catchy in the eyes of the girls, as Liam he finds himself to be happy only being Luna in which he can be himself as a girl and takes time to be a perfect girl. Luna, does not really figure out her identity, evokes her thought about transitions and expresses "No matter how much I wish, or pray, she's always with me. She is me. I am her. I want to be her. I want to be Luna". (Peters 21).

Julie Anne Peters who is young and adult author said, "Young adult is all about experimentation and risk-taking. There are no rules, no limitations, no literally expectations to overcome" as already discussed about the three major problems which causes transgender pictures the transitions as compared to a butterfly in the novel. The "butterfly" is considered to be the transition which explains Liam transforms from a male character into a girl.

The word butterfly has been repeated many times in the novel which insists more about transition. Due to this transition Luna is finding out her own self to prove to the society in which emerges the describing about the Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) in chapter Eight illustrating that, "Philo who writes about men transforming women", Liam describes the transgender people as two spirit people, and expose that "No one will ever know the person I am inside. The true me the girl, the woman. All they see is this ... this nothing (Peters 39).

It means that people won't understand because people did not see the other side of him. As they don't know his reality, they won't understand Liam's living of being a girl inside and outside. Aly who was Liam's best friend, was also not able to understand his insistence until Liam transformed his look, into Luna cross-dressing to confirm his identity. Liam who expresses it in a slow and soft voice, "My name is Luna. I want you to know me. The real me". (Peters 190). Transgender experience is a persistent and authentic difference between our assigned sex and our understanding of our own gender. It also leads to emotional distress.

Liam has no boyfriends. His mother admits it which reflects on the preference for playmates of his other sex. Liam describes in a weird voice of changing into other sex and also had a desire of dating with boy. Liam's tone of unraveling by his own words were: "Liam grabs his penis and starts to pull". "Take it off", he says, almost in whisper. He sashes toward Katie and repeats, "Take it off". (Peters 226).

The above lines designed that Liam reflects his assigned sex. The crying proofs in this novel show that he was shocked. It is Luna who is oppressed with father's measure. As the girl inside him, does not like male activity. It is obvious that Liam cannot participate with rough tumble game of boys that is baseball which his dad wished to do, but according to his father he is a boy who is supposed to fulfil his father's wish.

The first social impairment is the school and the second is home. The statement between Liam and his father destroys the relationship of son and father. Liam's father wants Liam to be like other kid, normal and happy. He worries that Liam does not idolize him like how he idolized his father years ago. Though Liam respects his father in a great manner, he always wished for being Regan, a girl that knows pretty inside and outside. These things emerge as a match with the disturbance manifested by symptoms such as preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary characteristics of Liam.

Due to variation of chromosomes, Liam does not respond to his testosterone and is not interested in female but, in the variation of natural order. Liam is genetically different and identified as transgender. It also depends upon the different cultures where it varies in the definition of masculine and feminine. Some cultures look at people and some have created specific ways for people to live in the roles that are different from that assigned to them at birth.

Transgender will not fit anywhere, because gender is followed by language. Likewise, boys were called to be handsome as well as girls pretty, but for transgender there is nothing like that. No survival way in the society.

Liam shows up his identity by saying about these violations as: “There was no place for him in the world. That he didn’t fit anywhere. He really was off the scale. Boy by day, girl by night. Except he was girl by all the time, inside. His body didn’t reflect his inner image. His body betrayed her”. (Peters 51).

The transgender people become a target of hate, crime or object of abuse in the society. The lifetime for them is very challenging and sometimes cause anxiety disorders. But Liam is different. He moves up in his life to put out a light to start over it through the plastic surgery. Liam’s words of expressing her feelings to Regan as “This isn’t good bye. It’s hello. I think of it as new beginning because that’s what it is for me. A rebirth. I’m starting my life over”. (Peters 247). Liam gives his first priority to Luna to live the life.

The strength of this novel is Luna’s determination. It fully focuses on Liam’s self-identity of confessing his transition into transgender. It also deals with LGBTQ literature which comprises of queer theory, responsible to instructional practice. It also discusses about the cultural stereotypes. Though identity with sense of self is considered to be the major idea of this novel, it also relates the bond between Regan and Luna who bring out the true self in a perfect way. The relationship of purity brings out Luna to reveal the true self of living her with truth.

The titular character in *LUNA* has always been identified as female. The story totally deals with the transformation of her and how other people react to it. Luna chooses her because it represents night and she reveals her real self only at night. Ultimately Luna does not really go through a transformation when she comes out. It is other people who have transformed their minds in the way of thinking and looking at her.

Liam puts in lot of efforts to project his true self to the world. Luna under the garb of Liam, hampers his spirit. He camouflages to Luna whenever he finds time. In precise, he feigns as a boy and lives as a girl. Liam as Luna invariably has the fear of being secluded from the conventional society. Hence, this fear makes the metamorphosis slow and painful. Living every second of life with juggling self-identity is a solemn stress. In this world, the masculine and feminine people have their identity of their own-selves but the third gender that is transgender does not have identity. Luna who wants to prove her own self in this idealized society wants to be shown that she is a third gender.

Through this novel, we get to understand that being a transgender is nothing strange. Even a transgender deserves a life of a normal human being. There is nothing absurd in him, we should understand their emotions and must be empathetic. The novel instigates the idea of togetherness, and everlasting relationship. It also inculcates hope and belief in humanity. Through this novel, we get to know how tough is to register one’s identity in the society. We always are the victims to the society’s expectations. It requires time to come out of the shells and stay stabilized.

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